Football Premiership Newcastle United 6 Wimbledon 1

Ferdinand teaches Dons a lesson

David Hopps

FOR Sam Hammam, Wimbledon's chairman, to present Newcastle United with a £1,000 cheque before kick-off was the greatest example of the poor giving to the rich since the introduction of the National Lottery.

Hammam had wagered last season that the Dons would finish above Newcastle in the league, a feat they failed to achieve by 16 points. This season, after only 10 matches, the gap is already a point wider.

Newcastle played luxuriously, aglow with quality, Premiership leaders by four points. Wimbledon are so beset by injuries that five straight defeats have left even their famously indomitable spirit in danger of collapse. Newcastle were idealists, walking on tiptoe; Wimbledon are on their uppers.

In the North-east the talk will be of Ferdinand's hat-trick — 12 Premier League goals now, and a rounded presence that was not always apparent at QPR — the insistent intelligence of Beardsley, and the wonderful flank play of Ginola and Gillespie. If Ginola is imported cool dude, Gillespie is more elemental: pacy, adventurous and still possessing a certain naivety.

Newcastle, after dallying for half an hour, scored three times in 10 minutes, with the wingers as providers each time. Howey outjumped Harford for the first, Ferdinand overpowered Reeves for the second and then scored again with a courageous diving header.

But the real hero lay elsewhere. No one can feel Wimbledon's present decline more painfully than Vinnie Jones, who even when his career took him elsewhere remained the personification of the club's scrap-and-survive instincts.

Jones kept goal for the last 35 minutes after Heald's umpteenth desperate charge from his line finished with a clumsy challenge on Ferdinand near the corner flag. Booked in the first half, the goalkeeper had clearly lost his bearings, if not his marbles.

Jones hauled on a green jersey to gleeful chants of "dodgy keeper". He bowed to the crowd, brought the house down by deliberately dropping a glove, and punched like a fishmonger slapping down half a pound of cod. Then he pulled off a double save.

It could not last. Long-range shots from Clark and Albert would have beaten anyone. Sandwiched in between was Ferdinand's hat-trick, a close-range effort when he was totally vulnerable. But Jones bore the crowd's humour with good grace.

Results and leading positions

FA CARLING PREMIERSHIP: Arsenal 2, Aston Villa 0; Chelsea 1, Man Utd 4; Coventry 0, Sheff Wed 1; Everton 1, Tottenham 1; Man City 0, Leeds 0; Middlesbrough 1, QPR 0; Newcastle 6, Wimbledon 1; Nottm Forest 3, Bolton 2; Southampton 1, Liverpool 3; West Ham 1, Blackburn 1. **Leading positions:** 1, Newcastle (played 10, points 27); 2, Man Utd (10-23); 3, Arsenal (10-21).

ENDSLEIGH LEAGUE: First Division: Barnsley 1, Port Vale 1; Birmingham 3, Grimsby 1; Charlton 1, Norwich 1; C Palace 1, Millwall 2; Huddersfield 1, Sunderland 1; Ipswich 0, Luton 1; Oldham 2, Reading 1; Sheff Utd 1, Leicester 3; Stoke 1, Derby 1; Tranmere 3, Southend 0; Watford 1, Wolves 1; West Brom 2, Portsmouth 1. **Leading positions:** 1, Leicester (13-25); 2, Millwall (13-25); 3, West Brom (13-24).

Second Division: Brentford 3, Peterborough 0; Bristol R 0, Notts Co 3; Burnley 3, Brighton 0; Carlisle 2, Bradford C 2; Chesterfield 1, Shrewsbury 0; Hull 1, Stockport 1; Oxford Utd 1, Wycombe 4; Rotherham 2, Blackpool 1; Swansea 1, Bournemouth 1; Swindon 2, Crewe 1; Walsall 1, Wrexham 2; York 0, Bristol C 1. **Leading positions:** 1, Swindon (13-32); 2, Notts County (13-25), 3, Crewe (12-24).

Third Division: Barnet 0, Rochdale 4; Bury 0, Scarborough 2; Cambridge Utd 0, Darlington 1; Chester 1, Fulham 1; Colchester 1, Northampton 0; Gillingham 4, Doncaster 0; Hereford 2, Exeter 2; Lincoln 0, Cardiff 1; Plymouth 4, Torquay 3; Preston 6, Mansfield 0; Scunthorpe 2, Leyton Orient 0; Wigan 1, Hartlepool 0. **Leading positions:** 1, Gillingham (13-27); 2, Preston (13-24); 3, Chester (13-24).

BELL'S SCOTTISH LEAGUE: Premier Division: Aberdeen 3, Partick 0; Hibernian 4, Motherwell 2; Kilmarnock 0, Celtic 0; Raith 0, Falkirk 1; Rangers 4, Hearts 1. **Leading positions:** 1, Rangers (9-24); 2, Celtic (9-18); 3, Aberdeen (9-16).

First Division: Dundee 1, Clydebank 1; Dunfermline 3, Dumbarton 1; Greenock Morton 4, St Johnstone 0; Hamilton 0, Dundee Utd 1; St Mirren 1, Airdrie 2. **Leading positions:** 1, Dunfermline (10-24); 2, Dundee Utd (10-19); 3, Morton (10-17).

Second Division: Berwick 4, Stranraer 0; Clyde 1, Ayr 2; East Fife 1, Forfar 1; Montrose 2, Stirling 2; Stenhousemuir 2, Queen of South 1. **Leading positions:** 1, East Fife (10-23); 2, Berwick (10-22); 3, Stenhousemuir (10-17).

Third Division: Alloa 3, Brechin 2; Arbroath 1, Ross County 2; Caledonian T 6, Albion 1; East Stirling 3, Cowdenbeath 1; Queen's Park 0, Livingston 1. **Leading positions:** 1, Livingston (10-26); 2, Ross County (10-18); 3, Caledonian (10-17).

Motor Racing Pacific Grand Prix

Bittersweet moment . . . Damon Hill looks on as Schumacher is hugged by Benetton team manager Flavio Briatore

Schumacher keeps his crown

Alan Henry at Aida, Japan

MICHAEL SCHUMACHER hurtled to his second successive world championship by winning the Pacific Grand Prix here in a manner which encapsulated the season.

At the first corner he had a brush with Damon Hill's Williams. After the race it was the familiar spat. And between times the German's race strategy developed an unstoppable momentum.

It carried his Benetton to victory by more than half a minute from the Williams-Renaults of David Coulthard and Hill, and confirmed him, at 26, as the youngest man to retain the Formula One title.

The dynamism of his recent performances makes him a worthy successor to Ayrton Senna, the Brazilian killed in a crash last year at Imola.

There are many parallels between the two. Schumacher has developed the self-reliance that was such a feature of Senna's character, and his talent inspires enormous loyalty and commitment from his team members. His move to Ferrari has brought no rancour and the Benetton mechanics still find him inspirational to work for.

He is consistently quick, responds instantly when requested to pile on the pressure and, as with Senna, the mere sight of his helmet in a rear-view mirror is enough to make rivals pull on to the hard shoulder.

The bottom line is that Schumacher has won this year's world championship by always getting the best out of a sometimes average car, the Benetton B195. By contrast Hill has too often got less than the best out of what is widely acclaimed as the leading F1 car of its generation.

On Sunday, both Williams drivers were left in differing degrees of mental disarray at the millionaire businessman Hajime Tanaka's tortuous mountain-top circuit near Osaka. Coulthard led the majority of the race, relinquishing the lead only at his second refuelling stop. He then got so badly held up in slower traffic that he was still behind Schumacher before his third refuelling stop. After that he had no chance of mounting an effective attack in the closing stages.

Hill, having edged Schumacher wide on the first corner, later became embroiled in a ferocious battle with him which spilled over into yet another acrimonious post-race debate on driving etiquette.

When Hill went to congratulate the German, Schumacher accused the Englishman of questionable tactics, which Hill immediately denied.

"Michael wasn't happy with what I did a couple of times in the race and has told me that he is unhappy with my driving," said Hill, who branded his rival's stance hypocritical.

"I find that extraordinary. The situation now is that we are free to drive as we like as long as we are not deliberately dangerous. He should have no complaints. I can't see what I have done wrong. There is one rule for him and another for everyone else at times."

Yet, despite provoking this response, Schumacher remained outwardly calm and reasonable, allowing Hill to dig himself into a corner by dint of his understandable indignation.

Next year, vows Hill, it will be different. Having been denied the title by Schumacher for the second straight season, he firmly believes he can put all the championship-winning elements in place for 1996.

"I think I am a better, stronger driver this year than I was last," he said, "and I think I can build on that next year. Clearly Michael has an advantage over everyone and, if I want to win, I am going to have to overhaul him."

Even with Schumacher in a potentially unreliable Ferrari, that will be easier said than done.

Cryptic crossword by Araucaria

Alphabetical jigsaw

Method: Solve the clues and fit the solutions into the diagram jigsaw-wise, wherever they will go.

- A Samson, saint in throes of suffering (9)
- B Dance around, and hold-ups I'll achieve (9)
  Awaits blue ribbon Johnnie said he'd bring (6,4)
- C Peak without much scenery, I believe (9)
- D Charge in which to find a bathyscape (5)
- E French in endless night of lassitude (5)
- F Charge for footwear, say: three-cornered cape (5)
- G Stainmore's stream to actress might allude (5)
- H Lovers' grief when each with earth is blurred (9)
- I Setter's growing old, with views in mind (7)
- J Light her B across was, spirit's heard (7)
- K King draw Jack for hanging in the wind? (5)
- L Red rose town Hunt and Aurora named (5)
- M Premier beat up doctor, boss of hell (5-4)
- N Arab region, start of vengeance maimed (5)
- O Work direction, you: I see it all (4,3)
- P Purify (say) aphrodisiac (7)
- Q Don't leave anything in Ecuador (5)
  With plugs for cash, Loligo's head's at back (5)
- R Girl with horse or dendron (jest of yore) (5)
- S Who sells pens and ink turned in at store (9)
- T Black-striped timber, shift we love to gird (5-4)
- U Thermal kennel's tenant must pay more? (2-7)
- V Painter or Cartesian, whirly bird? (9)
- W Ahab, spendthrift, eating fish in meat (7-6)
- X Goldfish state, or match with Hons' XI? (13)
- Y Toadies round, strayed off: they're obsolete (9'1,3)
- Z Coating black stuff, if one pet's in heaven (13)

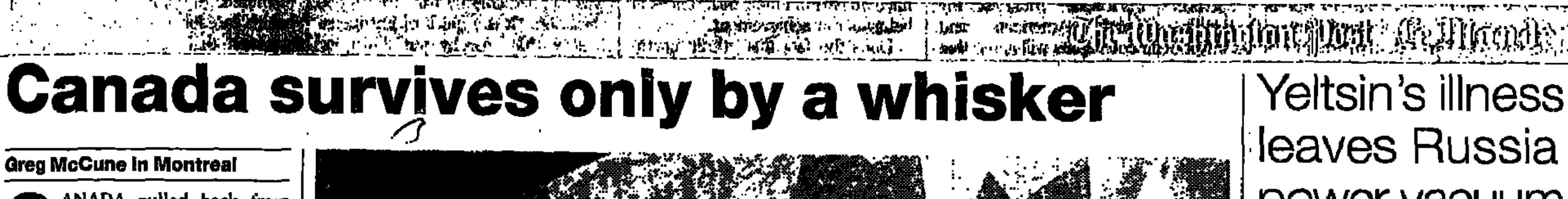
Last week's solution

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	R		U		N		D		L		I		A	
Y	A	R	D		T	A	M	B	O	U	R	I	N	E
	M				L		E		R		I		E	
O	B	T	U	S	E		N	O	O	N	T	I	D	E
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Canada survives only by a whisker

Greg McCune in Montreal

CANADA pulled back from the brink of breaking apart on Tuesday after the French-speaking province of Quebec voted by the narrowest of margins to stay in the country. In a nail-biting conclusion to Monday's referendum, the biggest threat to Canada's unity in its 128-year history, separatists were defeated by a razor-thin majority, 50.6 per cent to 49.4. The unofficial final count put the margin of defeat at only 53,000 votes out of 4.7 million cast.

As the rest of the country held its collective breath, the pro-Canada camp clawed back an early lead by the separatists, only going ahead with nearly 70 per cent of votes counted. It was the second failed bid for secession by Quebec in 15 years. Separatists were beaten 60:40 per cent in 1980.

But after coming tantalisingly close to victory, separatists immediately served notice that they will try again to take the province out of Canada. "We want a country and we will have it," Quebec's premier, Jacques Parizeau, yelled to a crowd of supporters in Montreal after he conceded defeat.

Political analysts said the narrowness of the result suggested that the Quebec issue had not been settled and Canada could be riven by dissension for years.

A strong majority of French-speakers, who make up 82 per cent of Quebec's population, voted for independence. But an overwhelming majority of English-speakers and immigrant groups rejected secession.

A bitter Mr Parizeau lashed out at these groups. "We are beaten, it is true. But by what? Money and the ethnic vote," he told supporters. "We [French-speakers] voted for 'Yes' by a margin of 60 per cent."

Tension ran high on the streets of Montreal after the vote as crowds of angry young separatists and Canadian unity supporters taunted each other and clashed. Some hurled stones and bottles at riot police who moved in to separate them.

Canada's prime minister, Jean Chrétien, called on Canadians to close ranks and heal the wounds of the bitter campaign. "The time has come for reconciliation," he said in a televised speech from Ottawa.

Criticised for underestimating the threat from the separatists, Mr Chrétien threw himself into the campaign to save Canada only in the last week. In a desperate bid to save the country, he offered his personal support in the final days before the vote for changes to the Canadian constitution long sought by Quebec to protect its French language and culture. "Let us work together to bring about the necessary changes. In particular this includes the recognition of the distinct character of Quebec society," Mr Chrétien said in a peace offering to the separatists.



Young Canadians in Montreal celebrate victory for federalism
PHOTOGRAPH: MIKE BLAKE

Outside Quebec, Canadians showed their relief as their country survived the gravest challenge in its history. They cried for joy, sang the national anthem, "O Canada", and waved the red and white maple leaf flag in celebration.

The Canadian dollar soared two US cents at the narrow victory. Canadian bonds and treasury bills also jumped. But financial analysts said the closeness of the vote raised troubling questions about the future of the country and the market optimism might not last.

The separatists looked headed for a decisive defeat until only three weeks ago when their charismatic leader, Lucien Bouchard, began criss-crossing the province making speeches calling for Quebec to take charge of its own destiny.

His message struck a deep vein of emotion among the Québécois, who have been increasingly frustrated by more than a decade of failed negotiations with Canada to rewrite the constitution to settle Quebec's grievances.

Peter Cooney adds: Canada has once again beaten back a threat to its unity from French-speaking separatists, but the grievances fuelling Quebec nationalism are no closer to being settled.

The narrow outcome offered no relief for those despairing of resolving the uncertainty over Quebec's future. "It's Canada's curse. We are probably the best country in the world. But the price for it is constitutional wrangling," said a Montreal economist, Marcel Cote.

Separatists have pursued their goal of Quebec independence since the 1960s. They gained a rallying cry in 1967 when President Charles de Gaulle shouted "Vive Le Quebec Libre" from the balcony of Montreal's City Hall.

In the 1970 "October Crisis", the radical separatist movement, Front de Libération du Québec, kidnapped a British trade commissioner, James Cross, and the Quebec labour minister, Pierre Laporte, who was later murdered. The Canadian prime minister, Pierre Trudeau, sent troops to Quebec to deal with the crisis.

The separatist Parti Québécois was elected in Quebec in 1976, but lost a 1980 referendum on sovereignty by 60:40 per cent. After support for Quebec nationalism surged again in the early 1990s, the Parti Québécois regained power last year and promised another referendum.

Many politicians and voters in English-speaking Canada are loath to resume what seems an interminable constitutional debate. However, Canadians seemed shocked and chastened by the tiny majority that saved them from losing Quebec. "The closeness of the 'No' vote tonight should serve as a wake-up call to all of us," said Preston Manning, leader of the rightwing reform party. — *Reuter*

Martin Woollacott, page 12

Yeltsin's illness leaves Russia power vacuum

James Meek and David Hearst in Moscow

THE world braced itself for six weeks of instability and intrigue in Russia as President Boris Yeltsin was ordered by his doctors to remain under strict medical supervision until the end of November.

His illness caused the cancellation of this week's Moscow summit of Balkan heads of state, and has ruled him out of any significant role in Russia's key December parliamentary elections.

The announcement of a prolonged hospital stay for Mr Yeltsin, aged 64, cast doubt on assurances that the president's heart condition would not prevent him from fulfilling his duties. His wife Naina was reported as saying he was "much better" after visiting him in hospital on Tuesday.

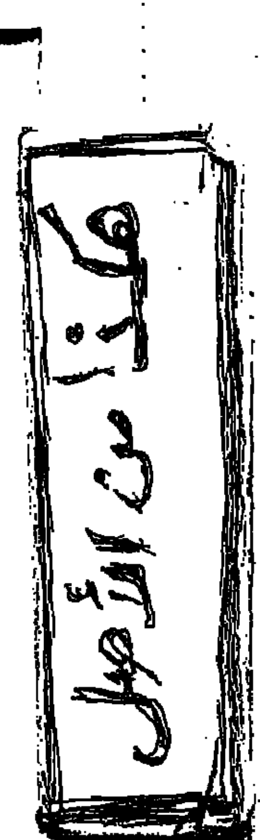
But calling off the meeting between the leaders of Croatia, Bosnia and Serbia would have come as a severe blow, given the personal stake Mr Yeltsin placed in regaining the Bosnian diplomatic initiative from the United States.

Mr Yeltsin's enthusiastic participation in the United Nations' 50th anniversary celebrations, and his equally ebullient behaviour in talks with President Bill Clinton last week, were said to have exhausted him, and to have been a possible factor in his collapse.

Under the constitution, most of the president's powers would pass to the prime minister, Viktor Chernomyrdin, in the event of his death or prolonged incapacitation.

Liberals barred, page 3
Comment, page 12

Austria	AS30	Malta	45c
Belgium	BF75	Netherlands	G 4.75
Denmark	DK16	Norway	NK 16
Finland	FM 10	Portugal	E300
France	FF 13	Saudi Arabia	SR 6.50
Germany	DM 3.60	Spain	P 300
Greece	DR 400	Sweden	SK 18
Italy	L 3,000	Switzerland	SF 3.30



Paying lip service to the American way

I FIND remarkable Natasha Walter's assertion ("Tongue tied to an English oral tradition", October 22) that "Americans tend to speak with much more fluency and control than the British". British speakers may lack the flamboyant style of certain orators, but it is a flamboyance made conspicuous by the absence of any distracting substance.

The best American speakers, like their British counterparts, eschew the "seductive parodies of infamy" praised by Ms Walter. Nor is participation in the "chattering flow" a habit we ought to be encouraging in our students. Flow is one quality that I have observed in the speech of all student groups, regardless of their national origins. My (American) English professor at university had a scatological term for such uncontrolled but insubstantial linguistic emissions.

My impression, after years of international school teaching and oral examining for the International Baccalaureate is that, on the whole, British students may be better prepared and more able to engage in both formal oral presentation and informal discussion than American students. Of course, the best students from both countries are equally good, the worst equally bad.

The need for a standardised English becomes more profound as English becomes more international. The American administrator whose memos to fluent but non-native English-speaking employees are incomprehensible because they are riddled with colourful American colloquialisms is hardly contributing to the vitality of the language. At the same time, standardised English should not become synonymous with the stripped down, 2,500-word international business variety. It can and ought to grow out of the shared linguistic experience of native English speakers worldwide. Most of my British, North American and Antipodean colleagues will agree that we all speak essentially the same language, and with equal success.

Eric Mace-Tessler,
Head of English, International School of Düsseldorf, Germany

Blinkered views of biology

SO POOR old Sir Roger Bannister is a racist (October 1) because he wondered if there is a physiological/anatomical basis to the success of black athletes in general and sprinters in particular.

According to Tim Radford's report (September 24), Bannister did no more than that — wonder about a biological explanation of a biological phenomenon. He did not attempt to explain the phenomenon genetically but he did include genetics among the possibilities.

Merely because he has dared to ask some reasonable questions he is accused of explaining sporting success "solely — or even primarily — by genetic factors", he is criticised for being a member of "a relatively leisured social élite" with "time for training during student life" — and so on.

What are these people trying to say? Are they trying to say that genetic factors can have no part in physical performance? If that is so, why is it that greyhounds, for example, can consistently run faster than corgis? Or are they saying that Man is the only animal whose physical attributes and patterns of behaviour have no genetic basis? "No," they would reply, "what we are saying is that in humans (they would not say 'Man') the relevant genes (whatever they might be) are distributed more or less equally through different ethnic groups and, therefore, can have no part in ethnic differences in behaviour or achievement."

Does the fact that ethnic northern Europeans are more susceptible to sunburn and skin cancer than ethnic Africans affect behaviour in any way? Is it racist to acknowledge that Pacific Islanders are generally bigger than Southeast Asians and, therefore, probably lift heavier weights? Is it racist to say that a high proportion of Southeast Asians cannot tolerate alcohol because they lack an alcohol dehydrogenase — or to recognise that, because of innate peculiarities in the control of their energy metabolism, Australian Aborigines, American Indians and some Pacific Islanders are highly susceptible to diabetes when exposed to western diets?

The disturbing thing in the letters is not so much a blinkered and distorted view of biology, but rather the accusations of something remarkably like heresy implicit in the attacks of Bannister. Those attacks have the smell of fundamentalism. They are likely to provoke from some sections of the population an equally fundamentalist backlash. It is unlikely to be a coincidence that the USA, birthplace of political correctness, is spawning some very nasty reactionary private militias.

A D Brown,
Tuross Head, NSW, Australia

Redressing past wrongs

AS AN expatriate New Zealander I'm very troubled to read about the burning of the Maori Cathedral in Otaki (October 15).

However, I'm also disturbed and angered by Andrew Higgins's reporting. Could it be the Guardian is more interested in the sensationalism of bad news than in the fuller truth? In this case, the context is not simply the old story of hypocrisy, injustice, and rage in the wake of colonialism. The fact is that in the last two decades New Zealand has been involved in an unparalleled effort to redress the wrongs of its colonial past. Inevitably there are white racists who think it's all too much and Maori radicals who think it's too little and too late. But although this gigantic task is far from fulfilled, there have already been profound and irreversible changes for the better in New Zealand society.

Among them, in contrast to Higgins's description of language as a "battleground", is the re-emergence of the Maori language. After being all but lost, it is now widely taught in schools and universities, to thousands of *pakehas* (whites) as well as to Maori. Every major official building and institution has a Maori name. Many public gatherings now follow the patterns of Maori tribal meetings. Words, phrases, and concepts from Maori language and culture are part of everyday discourse in a way that would have been unimaginable 25 years ago. It's still not enough, but it's pretty remarkable. Try transposing such changes to other post-colonial countries such as the US or France, and you'll see what I mean.

Jo Salas,
New Paltz, New York, USA

Natural roots of anarchy

JONATHAN STEELE ("The war that Spain tried to forget", October 15) provides a wholly new perspective on Spain's recent history. I was stopped cold by Mr Steele's observation: "It is a quirk of European history that anarchy put down its deepest roots in one of the continent's least industrial countries."

That is no quirk, but rather a natural outgrowth of what he described earlier in the article: "This was the period (1936) when grassroots resentment of the feudal institutions of Spanish society, the army, the church and the big landowners, was bursting uncontrollably to the surface."

The two other regions of Europe where anarchy took root in this century were southern Italy and eastern Europe (principally Isarist Russia) for the very same reasons given in the above quotation.

Those countries which experienced home-grown, communist revolutions in this century (much to the surprise of Marxists everywhere) — Russia, China and Cuba — also fit this description.

The popularity of socialism in newly independent Third World countries of the post-war era, similarly may be understood as a considered rejection of the option of evolving their own (liberal) democratic institutions, which in the West took about 300 years. They did not, they believed, have the time.

Anarchists, communists and Third World socialists shared the view that their societies most needed a "Great Leap Forward".

Donald P Hannon,
Bella Vista, Argentina

Environment under threat

SADLY, not all Australians "respect the environment and human values" ("Australians take to French-bashing", October 15). This year, for example, the State Government of Victoria has built a Formula One motor racing track in the middle of an inner Melbourne public park, destroying in the process more than 800 mature trees and installing a massive pit building in the centre of that park.

A community group, Save Albert Park, has suffered 380 arrests and held five rallies attracting crowds of 5,000-15,000 people in an attempt to stop this act of environmental vandalism.

To its shame the Australian press has made no more than limited criticisms of aspects of this venture. To my knowledge no other city has in recent years allowed such misuse of public parkland. All OECD countries keep such environmentally unfriendly events well away from urban populations.

The performances of the Victorian government and local press compares poorly with those of New York who rejected a similar proposal to use Flushing Meadow-Corona Park for the New York Formula One Grand Prix in the mid-1980s.

Currently two other inner city Melbourne parks are under threat. Australians tend to be complacent about their urban environment and have failed to develop tough controls to preserve urban parkland from greedy governments and developers.

David Littlewood,
Albert Park, Victoria, Australia

Briefly

DR DHALIWAL, the eye surgeon who "sadly" left Canada to practise in the USA (Washington Post, October 15) says he moved out of concern for his patients. He also left a nation that is struggling, but determined, to maintain a system of health care for all citizens, to work in a nation that seems just as determined never to permit universal medicare.

Since the doctor is so caring, perhaps he provides his services free to those Americans not fortunate enough to have health coverage. If he does not, maybe he should get his own eyes checked. He appears to be suffering from myopia.

Sandra Beardsall,
Cardiff, Ontario, Canada

IT WAS a shame to learn that a UN conference on controlling inhumane weapons had failed to agree on tighter controls over landmines (October 22). I hope they will be successful in future. They might like to add guns, hand-grenades, machetes and sticks to the agenda.

Howard Mulvey,
Kagoshima, Japan

HOW sad that the nineties equivalent of Martin Luther King's march on Washington was led by a fundamentalist bigot and specifically excluded women.

The attack on welfare in America has targeted the black mother, not father. And it was women who suffered from a rollback of affirmative action on the march — they had to stay at home and look after the kids.

John Medhurst,
London

HOW is it that we can locate the Titanic, put men on the moon and invent the nuclear missile, but women still can't get safe and reliable contraception ("Blood clot alert on brands of pill", October 29)?

Anna Steinitz,
London

HOW encouraging to see the French president, Jacques Chirac making the effort to be interviewed by Larry King in English during the recent UN celebrations.

How embarrassing then that our very own Prime Minister was incapable of using the language properly while trying to congratulate the UN interpreters who "interpretated" speeches into several languages.

If English politicians are too lazy to learn their own language properly, what hope is there to encourage them to learn to use other languages in this international age?

Karen Dartiguelongue,
St Cyr sur Loire, France

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All the president's men . . . supporters of incumbent Zanzibar president Salmin Amour, of the Chama Cha Mapinduzi movement, celebrate after he was pronounced winner of the island's first multi-party poll for more than 30 years. But the opposition disputed the result PHOTOGRAPH: CORINNE DUFKA

Opposition cries foul in Tanzania poll

Chris McGreal in Dar es Salaam

THE CREDIBILITY of Tanzania's presidential elections finally collapsed on Monday as the chaotic vote in Dar es Salaam was scrapped and a new poll called.

But the opposition said the election was so riven with fraud that it should be annulled across the country and a coalition formed. International observers said it was unlikely they would endorse as free and fair Tanzania's first multi-party presidential and parliamentary election since independence.

The national electoral commission tried to rescue the poll on Monday by announcing a new vote next week in Dar es Salaam, home to about 10 per cent of Tanzania's 9 million electors. It also ordered a second day of polling in the rest of the country for those who had not voted.

The chairman of the electoral commission, Judge Lewis Makame, admitted that many ballot papers had gone astray, that polling stations had failed to open, and that there was a popular suspicion of fraud, as there was when the ruling Chama Cha Mapinduzi won Zanzibar's election last week. That disputed result had prompted the threat of a popular boycott, which was withdrawn at the last minute.

But Mr Makame failed to offer a convincing explanation for the problems. Instead he appeared interested in ensuring the electoral commission was not blamed for failing to distribute ballots.

Opposition parties dismissed Mr Makame's assertion that the worst problems were confined to Dar es Salaam and there was no need for a rerun of the vote elsewhere.

They wrote a joint letter to him saying: "The opposition strongly feels the elections up to this time have been rigged and therefore are not free and fair . . . In order to avoid problems a provisional government should be formed under the chief justice, with all parties, to organise new elections."

But some constituencies continued as if nothing had happened. Returning officers opened ballot boxes, held counts and released results overnight. Others held a second day of voting after angry Tanzanians besieged polling stations. Government and opposition monitors slept next to ballot boxes overnight to protect them from tampering.

International observers are now leaving. Many said privately that they were unwilling to endorse the legitimacy of the poll.

But Mr Makame, who was criticised for failing to accept foreign assistance in the election, thought the departure of foreign observers no great loss. "We shall miss their company," was his only comment.

Tudjman fails to win free hand in vote

Julian Borger in Zagreb

CROATIA'S ruling party easily won Sunday's parliamentary elections, according to preliminary results announced on Monday, but fell short of the two-thirds majority it was seeking. It was also snubbed by voters in the capital, Zagreb, and was driven off the city council.

With about 77 per cent of the ballots counted, the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ), led by President Franjo Tudjman, had gained about 44 per cent of the vote — an unassailable lead over a broad opposition coalition, which has 19 per cent.

The final result will probably give the HDZ a majority of parliament's 127 seats, but it will almost certainly not win the 85 seats (two-thirds) necessary to change the constitution, despite blanket coverage of its campaign on national television and last-minute changes in the election law in the HDZ's favour.

Mr Tudjman called the election early in the hope of capitalising on recent military victories against the country's Serb rebels. But his party was spurned in Zagreb, where two out of four constituencies were won by opposition parties — former communists, liberals and peasants.

The HDZ was also driven off the city council, which wields influence over much of the country's industry. Slaven Letica, a political analyst, said: "Zagreb county is as important as parliament. For Mr Tudjman and his party this is a huge disappointment."

Observers from the Council of Europe declared the elections free and fair but expressed reservations about the HDZ bias in the state-run media and the new election law passed in September.

● Balkan leaders were due to hold peace talks in the US this week. The chief peace mediator, Richard Holbrooke, warned that there was no guarantee the talks would succeed.

New proof of Srebrenica atrocities

Michael Dobbs and R Jeffrey Smith

THE United States government has supplied international war crimes investigators with reconnaissance photos and other intelligence evidence of "approximately half a dozen" mass grave sites, in addition to those it has previously disclosed, where Bosnian Serb forces buried thousands of Muslims massacred last July.

US officials said at the weekend this new evidence supports the accounts of Bosnian Muslims and human rights groups who have described large-scale atrocities by the Serbs after they captured the United Nations "safe area" of Srebrenica in eastern Bosnia on July 11.

The US was first alerted to the possibility of mass killings in the area only a day or two after Srebrenica fell, in a phone call from the Bosnian foreign minister, Mohamed Sacirbey, to the US ambassador to the UN, Madeleine Albright.

Although the Clinton administration was quick to denounce reports of "brutal" and "inhumane" behaviour by the Bosnian Serbs, it did not go public with detailed evidence of the atrocities until nearly four weeks later. Ms Albright went before the UN Security Council in a private session on August 10 to present spy photographs of suspected mass graves and to accuse the Serbs of executing many Muslim refugees.

Officials blamed the delay in presenting intelligence evidence on the difficulties of sifting through a vast pile of reconnaissance photos to find corroborating evidence of atrocities. Since then, the administration has been hesitant to release data about the additional mass graves because of fears that the Bosnian Serb authorities might attempt to tamper with the sites to conceal the evidence, officials said. But they said the US has supplied all relevant information to the International War Crimes Tribunal in The Hague.

Other findings of the reconstruction of events include: western governments felt unable to respond militarily, before the assault, to a Bosnian Serb build-up around Srebrenica because they feared for the safety of several hundred Dutch peacekeepers in the enclave. Classified US diplomatic cables show that the Dutch defence minister, Joris Voorhoeve, repeatedly depicted the situation in the enclave as "hopeless" and opposed the use of Nato air power, despite requests by the local Dutch commander for deterrent strikes.

US intelligence officials say they have information indicating that regular units of the Serb-dominated Yugoslav army crossed into Bosnia and were involved in the assault on Srebrenica, together with Bosnian Serb forces that ostensibly are independent of Belgrade. This disclosure adds credibility to earlier accounts from some journalists and UN officials that Yugoslavia aided its Bosnian Serb allies in the military attack on Srebrenica, although not necessarily in the atrocities that followed.

Republican congressional leaders have attacked the Clinton administration's strategy of negotiating with Serbia's president Slobodan Milosevic on grounds that Mr Milosevic may be linked to atrocities. — *The Washington Post*

Row as Russia bars liberal party

James Meek and David Hearst in Moscow

AS PRESSURE grew on Russian authorities this week to reverse the ban on the liberal Yabloko bloc from taking part in December's parliamentary elections, the movement's leader, Grigory Yavlinsky, accused Boris Yeltsin's circle of taking advantage of the president's illness to undermine the democratic process.

The supreme court may yet overturn the ban, which was made on an arcane technicality, and Yegor Gaidar, the former prime minister, on Monday confirmed that his liberal right-of-centre party, Russia's Choice, would pull out of the elections if Yabloko were not registered.

But Mr Yavlinsky, who did not name those he accused, said his criticisms extended to presidential elections in June, where he is expected to be among the five front-runners.

Remarking on Sunday's refusal by the central electoral commission to register Yabloko, Mr Yavlinsky said: "Calculating on Boris Yeltsin's illness, the bureaucratic élite of his inner circle are preparing to introduce corrections in the future results of the elections."

There was dismay across the political spectrum at the exclusion of Yabloko, the last bastion of liberal moderation.

"The Russian political arena would be poorer without such a popular leader as Yavlinsky," Mikhail Lapshin, leader of the Agrarians, said.

The prime minister, Viktor Chernomyrdin, whose party, Our Home Is Russia, is closely tied to the administration, said the ban was "ill-considered and harmful".

Mr Gaidar said: "The elections would be turned into a political farce, and we will not take part."

Yabloko's lawyers believe they have a strong case against the electoral commission to take to the Russian supreme court in the next few days.

The Russian central electoral commission said that Mr Yavlinsky's party — Yabloko is an acronym of its three founders — had violated election rules by dropping candidates from its election list. The party claimed some regional candidates had had no time to gather the required number of signatures, and agreed to erase their names from the national party list.

Nikolai Ryabov, the commission's chairman, told a Yabloko representative: "You think that if Yabloko has a faction in parliament and influence in the country you can violate the law. We do not think so." The commission voted by 10 to three against Yabloko's registration.

Behind the ruling lies the complicated procedural issue of gathering signatures for regional party candidates and the national lists. The problem is that most people believe that Mr Ryabov or his commission are influenced by the Kremlin, which appointed them.

Mr Yavlinsky, who has scored highly in the opinion polls as a future presidential candidate, was the author of one of the first economic reform plans, later replaced by Mr Gaidar's shock-therapy programme. He has been a stringent critic of Mr Yeltsin in parliament.

If the supreme court upholds the commission's decision, this would destroy one of the most influential groups of liberal reformers. Of the three democratic groups, Yabloko was the most likely to clear the 5 per cent hurdle needed to be recognised as a parliamentary faction.

The party vote is unlikely to transfer to Mr Gaidar or to Boris Fyodorov, the leaders of the other liberal faction, nor to Viktor Chernomyrdin's Our Home Is Russia. Yabloko voters would instead stay away from the polls.

In a more predictable decision at the weekend, the commission disqualified the nationalist movement headed by Mr Yeltsin's deadliest foe, the former vice-president, Aleksandr Rutskoi.

Mr Ryabov said Derzhava (Strong State) had lost 86 people since it was submitted for approval, and so was collecting voters' signatures for people who were no longer planning to run.

The signatures hurdle is a formidable one. Each party has to submit 200,000 signatures, gathered in at least 15 regions. The signatures of each region must not comprise more than 7 per cent of the total.

Mr Rutskoi accused the commission of bias, and of carrying out "a political order" from the government. He said he would appeal in the supreme court.

The list controversy is certain to be used to exclude other parties — especially communist and agrarian parties, which are expected to do best.

The Week

TAMIL TIGERS and civilians fled the rebel headquarters of Jaffna as Sri Lankan armed forces approached to within a few miles of the northern town.

A FILIPINA maid, Sarah Balabagan, was sentenced to 100 symbolic, painless lashes, a year in jail and deportation from the United Arab Emirates on payment of $41,000 blood money to the family of the man she killed.

SOUTH Korean prosecutors are to question former president Roh Tae-woo after his confession that he raised $654 million while in office.

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NICK LEESON, the "rogue" Barings trader, could get away with a Singapore jail sentence as short as 12 months as a result of plea bargaining.

SPAIN's scandal-ridden government slipped deeper into crisis when the parliament threw out its budget for next year.

A QUESTION mark hung over the political future of media tycoon Silvio Berlusconi after Italy's prime minister, Lamberto Dini, pulled off a stunning parliamentary victory to win at least two more months in office.

CULT GURU Shoko Asahara sacked his lawyer, in effect postponing until the new year his trial for masterminding the March nerve gas attack on the Tokyo underground.

EIGHTEEN Russian soldiers were killed when their convoy was ambushed in the separatist region of Chechenia, according to Russian television.

DOCTORS in Nicaragua are baffled by a dengue-like disease that has killed 12 people and infected 900. The illness produces fever, headache and bleeding from the eyes and nose but tests for haemorrhagic dengue have proved negative.

NEARLY 2,330 inmates have died from disease in Rwanda's packed jails, Red Cross officials said.

US REPUBLICAN congressional leaders boasted of an "historic achievement" in passing balanced budget plans.

TURKISH President Suleyman Demirel approved a new right-left coalition government led by prime minister Tansu Ciller, paving the way for general elections in December.

TERRY SOUTHERN, the American satirist best known for co-writing the screenplays of Dr Strangelove and Easy Rider, has died aged 71.

Jihad vows to avenge killing

Derek Brown in Jerusalem

PALESTINIAN militant groups vowed bloody revenge for the killing of Fathi Shqaqi, Islamic Jihad's founder and leader, gunned down by professional assassins in Malta last week.

The militants blame Israeli agents for the murder in broad daylight. It only became certain at the weekend that the victim, first identified as a Libyan businessman, was Shqaqi travelling under an alias.

"We tell the Zionists headed by the terrorist Rabin [Israel's prime minister] that this horrendous crime will make every Zionist wherever they are on the face of the earth a target to our amazing blasts and our bodies exploding in anger," said an Islamic Jihad statement.

Palestinian sources indicated that Shqaqi was killed on his way back to Damascus from Libya. He had apparently been interceding with Colonel Muammar Gadafy to reconsider his stated aim of expelling up to 30,000 Palestinian workers from Libya, in protest against the Palestine Liberation Organisation's peace deal with Israel.

Israel neither acknowledged nor denied involvement in the assassination, but political leaders welcomed the removal of a hated militant chief. Of all Palestinian factional leaders in exile, Shqaqi was probably top of the Mossad (external secret service) hit-list.

Shimon Peres, the foreign minister, doubted if it would affect an Israeli-Palestinian peace. "I think his business was murdering, so if there will be one murderer less, I don't see how it's going to affect the peace process," he said.

Shqaqi, who had run Islamic Jihad for 12 years, was born in a Gaza Strip refugee camp in 1952. He worked briefly as a paediatrician, after training at medical school in Cairo where he was strongly influenced by the Muslim Brotherhood. He had been based in Damascus since being deported by Israel at the start of 1988.

From the Syrian capital he directed a web of militant cells, mainly operating in the Gaza Strip and striking Israeli targets with suicide bombs and solo stabbing missions.

Islamic Jihad became one of the most feared and detested of the so-called rejectionist groups which have vowed to destroy the Israel-PLO self-rule peace accord. In the past year, four suicide bombers have killed 30 Israelis, mostly soldiers. The group spurned all peace talks with Israel or co-operation with the PLO. Shqaqi insisted that the armed struggle would continue until the Jewish state was destroyed.

The same shrill language was used in the response to the killing by other militant groups. Hamas, the biggest Islamic movement, described the assassination as "a new declaration of war by the Zionist entity" and the Popular and Democratic Fronts for the Liberation of Palestine said in a joint statement that the "enemy's crime will not go unpunished".

Islamic Jihad announced that Shqaqi's role would be taken over by Ramadan Abdullah, another Gaza man, but one who is virtually unknown outside the movement.

The clinically planned and executed murder of Shqaqi in Malta is the latest of a series of assassinations and abductions that Arab groups say make nonsense of Israel's claim to be the region's only democratic state.

Over the years the Israeli secret services have built up a formidable knowledge of assassination and kidnap techniques, which they have put to work on many occasions with ruthless effect.

Pointed protest . . . French farmers against cheaper imports build a pyramid of fruit and vegetables near the Louvre PHOTO: MICHEL GANGNE

Tunnel fire in Azerbaijan metro kills more than 300

David Hearst in Moscow

MORE THAN 300 people died last week in one of the world's worst underground railway disasters in Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan, after being trapped in smoke on a packed train that caught fire in a tunnel.

The death toll rose as bodies were recovered from the carriages. Hospital officials said 337 had died and 270 were injured, more than 60 seriously, from burns and smoke inhalation.

President Haydar Aliyev declared two days of national mourning and a special commission of inquiry was set up under Abbas Abbasov, the deputy prime minister.

Although the underground has been hit twice in the past 18 months by terrorist bombers, officials in Baku said a spark from a high voltage cable was the most likely cause of the fire. President Aliyev suggested a technical fault had caused it.

Survivors gave harrowing accounts of trying to get out of the train and then stumbling through smoke-filled tunnels where the electric rails were still live. Rescue workers said the smoke was so thick that it was impossible for them to enter the tunnels.

Gennady Nikiferev was travelling in the first carriage of the train when it halted after a huge flash between Ulduz and Narimanov underground stations.

"The train went on for a bit and then stopped. The driver came back but couldn't open the doors. Then the lights went out. After a while we started to suffocate from the smoke and we realised we had to open the doors. The car was packed and when we opened the doors half the people just fell out on top of each other," he said.

The tunnel was full of suffocating passengers, some of whom fell onto the live rails and were electrocuted. "We started to run towards Narimanov station," Mr Nikiferev said.

Manish Gurbanov, aged 53, was in the second carriage and climbed through a ventilation duct. "We couldn't break the windows so we climbed out through a ventilation duct. I got through the tunnel by grabbing a cable on the top of the tunnel, but they say a lot of other people were electrocuted. People were dying all over the rails."

Baku's underground is one of the older former Soviet railways. Its small network of 18 stations was opened in 1967, but there has been little maintenance in a country which has been at war with Armenia over the enclave of Nagorno Karabakh.

Many have feared a disaster similar to London's King's Cross in Moscow, with its network of old wooden escalators in stations packed with thousands every rush hour.

Twenty people were killed and dozens injured in the two bomb attacks in Baku's underground. No one claimed responsibility for either attack but the authorities suspected political opponents of Mr Aliyev, a former communist who has survived several coup attempts.

Saro-Wiwa awaits verdict

Cindy Shiner in Lagos

JUDGMENT is expected this week in the trial of the Nigerian minority rights leader Ken Saro-Wiwa for alleged complicity in the murder of four Ogoni chiefs who disagreed with his tough stand against the government and the Shell oil company in petroleum-rich Ogoniland.

Mr Saro-Wiwa, president of the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (Mosop), could be sentenced to death if he is found guilty. He was charged with 14 other people, nine of whom heard their verdicts on Monday. Among them, five received death sentences and four were acquitted.

The four chiefs were killed last year, allegedly by pro-Saro-Wiwa youths who accused them of taking bribes from government officials and thwarting the Ogoni movement.

The accused have been denied access to ordinary courts or any right of appeal.

A death sentence for Mr Saro-Wiwa could prompt Britain and the US to freeze the military rulers' bank accounts and have Nigeria suspended from the Commonwealth.

SA generals face murder charges

David Tucker in Johannesburg

SOUTH AFRICA'S former defence minister, General Magnus Malan, and 10 senior officers are due to be arrested for the murders of 13 blacks when they appear at Durban regional court this week.

The safety and security minister, Sydney Mufamadi, said at the weekend that the men would face murder charges over hit-squad killings in 1987. White conservatives immediately accused the ANC-led government of a witch-hunt.

The National Party leader and deputy president, F W de Klerk, said that the former generals should be given temporary exemption from prosecution like many ministers in the present government because they played a crucial role in the peaceful transition to black majority rule.

The National Party's justice spokesman, Danie Schutte, was reported as saying: "Many African National Congress (ANC) cabinet ministers would not have been ministers had they not received temporary indemnity . . . They were among 77 leading ANC figures who received temporary indemnity for similar acts."

Those named included former defence force chief General Jannie Geldenhuys, former army chief Kat Liebenberg, and former military intelligence director Tienie Groenewald.

Mr Mufamadi said they would be charged with the killings of 13 blacks in the Zulu heartland of KwaZulu-Natal. Their indictments are also related to their alleged roles in establishing a paramilitary force for the Zulu-based Inkatha Freedom Party — which was allegedly responsible for the massacre.

Gen Malan was defence minister from 1980 until demoted in 1991 after anti-apartheid groups demanded his resignation over his hawkish stance in dealing with black township unrest. He has long been accused of fanning conflict between rival black groups and giving the go-ahead for murders of anti-apartheid activists.

Political analysts were puzzled at the timing of the charges, just three days before the country's first all-race local government elections aimed at destroying the last official vestiges of apartheid. They believe the move could help unite South Africa's fractious white right wing.

Press gangs target children

Kidnapping raids are being used to fuel Sudan's long-running civil war, writes **Kathy Evans** in Juba

FOR the past year, Masoma Thura has been engaged in a search he vows never to give up — for his son, Ater, aged 10.

In August last year, Ater was playing football outside the family house in the Sudanese capital, Khartoum. That was the last Mr Thura saw of him. Ater had become the latest victim of the state-sponsored kidnapping of young children for service in Sudan's civil war.

Government officials say the raids are designed to round up street children and give them a chance of food and education. Western human rights activists say the child soldiers are all black and Christian, and once in the camps they are force-fed Islam and military training.

Nor is the tactic confined to the mainly Muslim north. Rebel groups in the Christian south also engage in such recruitment raids, human rights groups say.

Mr Thura is pursuing the case through a special "kidnapping court" established by the government to help parents locate lost children. "I have spent all I can on bribes to get information about my son's whereabouts. I managed, through one official, to get into a children's camp in the east. I saw thousands of children — someone said there were 13,000 there. Some were chained to beds. I never found my son, though," he sighs.

The enslavement of children for war is the most tragic aspect of the racial and religious conflict that has raged in Sudan for more than two generations.

More than 200 years ago, northerners viewed the south as a source of slaves. To the country's 5 million black Christians, the child soldiers seem a painful repetition of history.

Sudan's Christian community considers itself part of central Africa. Northerners say their country is Arab and part of the Muslim world. Travelling south to Juba, the divide is apparent. The countryside is dotted with churches and small African-style villages, with houses made of mud and topped with thatch. Here, the language is not Arabic, but English.

More than a million people have been killed and 300,000 displaced in the civil war. And no end is in sight to the conflict that absorbs nearly two-thirds of the budget. In September, the most recent high-profile mediator, the former US president Jimmy Carter, gave up in frustration.

Militarily the initiative is with Khartoum, yet politically and psychologically the region long ago slipped from its control. The regime's *éminence grise*, Dr Hassan Turabi, claims the government controls nine out of 10 southern states.

The reality is that Khartoum controls a handful of towns while the rebels hold the countryside. In Juba, the guerrillas of John Garang's Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) are just 25 miles away.

Juba's governor, Agnes Poni Lukudu, admits the town relies for its supplies on a monthly steamer and twice-daily flights from Khartoum. Prices are nearly four times those in Khartoum. Hospital employees say high food prices lead to about 10 child deaths a week from starvation.

Khartoum officials say fighting is confined to the rebel groups themselves. Tribal divisions between the Dinka-dominated SPLA and the Nuer-dominated South Sudan Independence Army have badly splintered the rebel movement.

Sleaze factor hits Australia's Labor Party

Christopher Zinn in Sydney

THE LABOR government in Australia has been accused of sleazy fundraising activities after offering business executives £10,000 meetings with the prime minister, Paul Keating.

It also offered private enterprise the chance to "sponsor" drinks with senior ministers after a cabinet meeting for £5,000.

The scheme was revealed in a leaked memo from a Queensland public relations firm, Marketplace Communications, which the Labor Party has admitted asking to make the offers.

"It's as if the cabinet of this country is up for a few pieces of silver," said Tim Fischer, leader of the National Party. "There's a touch of sleaze associated with this latest effort by the ALP [Australian Labor Party]".

The Democrats, who are powerful in the senate, the upper chamber in the parliament, called the scheme "rent-a-cabinet" and said that it could lead to MPs accepting money to raise matters in Question Time, as had happened in Britain.

"We've seen the ultimate asset sale — of the prime minister and cabinet," said Cheryl Kernot, the Democrats' leader, who revealed the memo. She has also put forward a code of conduct for MPs.

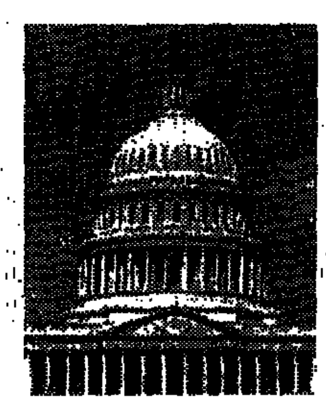
A senior minister has admitted that the ALP blundered in suggesting that meetings with Mr Keating could be bought, and said no such meetings had taken place.

"I think they [the party] just need to draw a proper line of distinction as to where probity starts and finishes," said Robert Ray, the acting leader of the senate.

But the ALP's federal secretary, Gary Gray, said the only mistake had been the company's "clumsy wording" of the offer.

● Australian intelligence agencies are closely monitoring a growing threat from violent anti-Asian, rightwing and religious extremist groups, outlined in their annual report to parliament, Mr Keating said last week.

UN revives spectre of Ugly American



The US this week

Martin Walker

THE DOMINANT impression of the massive international jamboree that marked the 50th anniversary of the United Nations was the extraordinary degree of resentment that the delegates of most countries now feel for the United States. The clearest display was the speech by Cuba's Fidel Castro, who was cheered to the echo in the longest and most fervent ovation of the three days, even though he did not attack the US by name.

Castro, who took off his famous green fatigues and donned a suit and tie for the occasion, attacked the broad principle of trade embargoes and sanctions, of the kind now being applied to Iraq by the UN as a whole, and long imposed by the US on Cuba. The US is trying to bully other nations to observe the embargo on Cuba by holding hostage the business their companies do in the US. The problem with sanctions is that they bite hardest not on ruling élites, who can usually smuggle their way past them, but on ordinary people. Sanctions may translate into political pressure in a democracy, but Iraq and Cuba are not democracies.

In his other appearances and in US television interviews, Castro was far more outspoken about the US and the embargo. The most telling point he made was that "The US created me in heroic mould. The US made me into the little David who refuses to bend and goes up against the US Goliath".

That was the theme that won Castro his applause in the Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem, just off Malcolm X Boulevard, named after another figure who played David to the US Goliath, but lasted far less long than Castro has.

It was a strikingly childish performance, rather like a school assembly getting back at the headmaster by cheering the bad boy. But there was a great deal of childishness on display, not least by the US hosts. Castro was pointedly not invited to President Clinton's grand dinner for all the other delegation heads. New York's mayor, Rudi Giuliani, outdid his president by refusing to invite Castro or the PLO chairman Yasser Arafat to his welcoming banquet, and then asking Arafat to leave a commemorative UN concert.

This arrogant and unworthy behaviour does not wholly explain the widespread antagonism towards the US. If there is one overwhelming explanation, at least in the public remarks of the various delegations, it is outrage that the world's richest country remains some $1.4 billion in arrears to the UN, for its annual subscription as well as for its share of the bills for peacekeeping. They were missions for which the US had voted, from its privileged perch in the Security Council. Even the French and British made a few pointed remarks about these debts.

But this does not get to the heart of the matter. The surprise is that this resentment survives beyond the cold war, when the superpowers routinely used the UN as an arena for their wider struggles. In the 1970s and early 1980s, the US stood up for its ally, Israel, in a UN where Arab oil wealth reinforced the General Assembly's partiality for the Palestinian cause. Israel is no longer a pariah at the UN, but a member in excellent standing with valuable diplomatic connections with Egypt, Jordan and other Arab countries. And yet the US remains roundly and uniquely disliked.

Most big countries behave badly on occasion, and most powerful UN members have abused the organisation. The US is not alone in the way it has used the UN as a moral fig leaf for its policies in the Gulf war, and then tossed the institution aside like a soiled handkerchief when it no longer meets its needs, as it has done in Bosnia. The Soviet Union used to do much the same, stalking out of the UN when the General Assembly would not recognise Red China, and then turning to the UN to condemn the "imperialist" British, French and Israeli attacks on Egypt in 1956, even while refusing to let the UN express its outrage at the simultaneous Soviet crushing of the Hungarian uprising.

Jacques Chirac was breathtakingly cool to use the UN podium to hail the coming era of no more nuclear tests less than a week before the French military staged the third round of subterranean explosions at Mururoa, that hunk of irradiated rock in the South Pacific.

CHINA these days exercises a similar hypocrisy, maintaining its wretched occupation of Tibet and insisting that this, like its human rights policies, is an internal matter over which the UN has no say.

"Certain big powers, often under the cover of 'freedom' and 'democracy' and 'human rights', set out to encroach upon the sovereignty of other countries, interfere in their internal affairs and undermine their national unity and ethnic harmony. This has become the principle cause of intranquility in the world today," ran the speech of President Jiang Zemin of China. But it was another argument in his speech which may have come closest to analysing the roots of the US's unpopularity.

"To deliberately ignore the colourful and diverse reality of the world and to practise such hegemonic acts as imposing one's own social system, mode of development and values upon others and wilfully threatening them with isolation and sanctions can only begin by harming others, and end by hurting whoever does this. To base one's own prosperity on the continued poverty and backwardness of others under the unjust and irrational international economic order is unpopular, and to attempt to monopolise world affairs and dominate the destiny of other nations will get nowhere."



The resentment of the US may have a simple psychological explanation, that the richest and strongest kid on the block will always evoke mixed feelings from others. And the US remains a constant presence in the lives of most other countries in an extraordinary way. This is not simply a matter of the overseas military bases, the Pentagon's far-flung empire on which the sun never dares to set. It is also the global cultural dominance of the US through Levi jeans and Coca-Cola, and now through Windows 95 through the omnipresent dollar and the global reach of US-based transnational corporations.

There are intriguing signs of a similar resentment building towards the Japanese in that new Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere that the strong yen has been building. There remains considerable resentment of the Germans in Europe, and of the French in Africa. The current campaigns for a republic in Australia and for Quebec sovereignty in Canada suggest that the old high-handed ways of Britain are neither entirely forgotten nor forgiven.

But the US did not always inspire such sullen acquiescence to its power. In comparative terms the US may have been richer and more powerful at the beginning of the 1960s, when John Kennedy was an extraordinarily popular figure, and the US provoked far less hostility. Perhaps it all began with what Senator William Fulbright called "the arrogance of power" over Vietnam. Perhaps it was the way the assassinations of John and Robert Kennedy, and of Martin Luther King, and the urban riots and the much-televised evidence of racism and endemic crime served to discredit what much of the world thought it understood of US civilisation.

The irony here is that the US exercises its sway with a far lighter hand than any other imperial power in history, from ancient Rome to the British Empire to the Soviet Union and even modern China. That unfair economic system that Jiang condemned is currently allowing the People's Republic to enjoy a $30 billion-a-year trade surplus with the US. Castro gets invited on to US TV to make his case. And the US has every right to trumpet the exportable merits of its democracy and its regard for individual human rights, even though the 1.5 million people now in its prisons suggest that the concept of gulag may not be peculiar to totalitarian regimes.

One reason why the UN delegations like to thumb their noses at the US is that they can, on the whole, get away with it. The US will put up with a lot, even permitting dependent allies like the Saudis to decline the deployment of US troops and warplanes, and then courting the Saudi monarchy to sell some $6 billion worth of Boeing airliners. It prefers to bribe, rather than bully a country like North Korea to halt its nuclear weapons programme, and in the interest of a wider Middle Eastern peace, it even treats Syria's deeply unpleasant regime with courteous honour.

ADMITTEDLY, Libya's Colonel Muammar Gadafy survived a US attempt to assassinate him through bombing. But he remains in power, as does Saddam Hussein. One of the most interesting developments of the past week was something that emerged from the office of the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Newt Gingrich, who is trying to force an extra $18 million on the CIA for covert operations against Iran. The money was not requested by the CIA nor by the Clinton administration, but Gingrich thinks that destabilisation and regime-toppling is a useful way to invest the taxpayer's money.

This, in itself, may offer the beginning of an explanation for the revival of the UN's suspicion of the Ugly American. There is no longer a single US foreign policy, but two. Clinton's administration continues to operate a broadly traditional and internationally engaged diplomacy that seeks to be reasonable and responsible while pursuing its grander vision of a free-trading world in which the US can continue to dominate the global economy. But then Clinton, as we have seen so often in his flexible approach to domestic matters, has a backbone as strong as an overripe banana.

Congress now seeks to impose an isolationist diplomacy that occasionally lashes out with venom when a vested interest or a prickly pride or a potent constituent is involved. Most of the scrapes in which US foreign policy is now involved have been imposed on the White House by Congress. The row with China began when Congress passed a resolution demanding that the president of Taiwan be given a visa to attend his college reunion in upstate New York. Gingrich made matters far worse when he suggested airily that recognition of Taiwan's independence might be a good idea.

The further bullying of Cuba is also being pressed on Clinton by Congress. The odious Senator Jesse Helms, chairman of the Senate foreign relations committee, is now holding up the appointment of a new US ambassador to Beijing until the State Department caves in to his demands for more cuts, and for ending any US support for the International Labour Organisation, a UN agency.

The nightmarish prospect of the US brokering a peace in Bosnia but then not being permitted to send 20,000 US troops to the Nato intervention force is the most ominous threat of Congress's alternative foreign policy. Gingrich's fondness for a juicy little cloak-and-dagger operation in Tehran is a mere bagatelle by comparison. But the sense that the White House no longer runs diplomacy helps to explain why Castro got the ovation he did, why the bully of Tibet can get away with lecturing the UN about human rights, and why that evocative phrase "the Ugly American" is echoing through the UN corridors once more.

New Chernobyl feared as old reactors restart

Ian Traynor in Bonn and David Hearst in Moscow

ARMENIA has started operating an old and highly suspect nuclear reactor in an earthquake zone, raising fears of a Chernobyl-type disaster. The country, which is seriously short of energy, has admitted not carrying out all necessary safety measures at the reactor because of lack of funds.

The decision to restart the Metsamor plant, more than six years after it was mothballed for safety reasons, was criticised last week by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in Vienna, by Germany and by western nuclear experts.

But the Armenians, facing the bitter Caucasian winter, appear determined to restart the old pressurised water reactor, of a Soviet design described by the US as dangerous enough to cause an accident "akin to Chernobyl".

Bulgaria has also just recommissioned a similar reactor at Kozloduy, bringing strong criticism from Germany, France and the European Union. Under the terms of an EU aid agreement, the Bulgarians had promised to keep the reactor closed down. Then, last month, the suspect reactor was brought into operation to offset the risk of large-scale power cuts this winter.

Arkady Avakian, Armenia's energy minister, told the IAEA last week: "I am pleased to inform you that despite the difficulties . . . the operations for the restart of reactor unit number two have been practically completed."

Hans Meyer, an IAEA spokesman, said: "The position of . . . every expert in the nuclear field to the Armenian plan is: don't do it." The reactor in Armenia "has barely been serviced in any big way for the past six years", Mr Meyer said. "If you let a reactor like that lie dormant for six years, how can you just restart it?"

Siegfried Breyer, a German environment ministry official, said: "Metsamor is in the middle of an earthquake zone . . . western safety experts say it's not fit for an earthquake zone and there's no way it can be made safe."

The Metsamor plant was closed down in February 1989, three months after the Armenian earthquake that killed 25,000 people. The station was unaffected by the tremors, but fears of a catastrophe soared.

Even outside an earthquake zone, the reactor type — the VVER-230 440-megawatt type designed in the 1960s and built in the 1970s — has long been criticised in the West as unsafe. Besides Armenia's, there are 10 such reactors — none protected by the containment shells standard in the West — operating in post-Soviet Europe: four in Bulgaria, two in Slovakia and four in Russia. There are also another 15 Chernobyl-type RBMK reactors in use across the region.

Last summer a US energy department study on the VVER-230 reactors found they posed "significant safety risks . . . As a class these reactors continue to experience serious incidents, raising the spectre of another accident".

The Armenian plant is 35 miles from Yerevan, the capital, where 2 million people live and, according to Mr Avakian, 12 miles from an earthquake zone. The station was being restarted despite a failure, due to lack of funds, "to implement everything that was planned in the safety areas".

Last month a Russian state commission finally signed the document allowing the Armenian reactor to restart. Armen Abagyan, director of the Scientific Research Institute for the Nuclear Power of Russia, said: "The Armenian people can be calm, as everything is done to provide security of the work of the Armenian nuclear station."

Georgi Kaurov, chief of the information directorate of Ministry of Atomic Energy in Moscow, said: "Armenia is a seismic zone, but so is Japan. Despite this they have 50 nuclear reactor units. What is really important . . . is what kind of geological platform lies under the station."

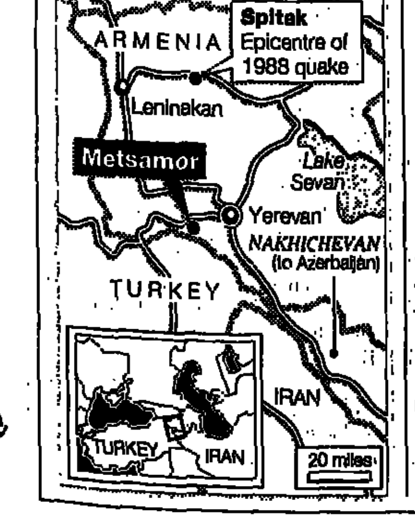
THE STATION was designed to survive a shock of eight to nine points on the Richter scale, Mr Kaurov said: "It was working during the December 1988 earthquake and no damage was detected. The IAEA gave its report on this station and it was positive."

Experts agree that Armenia and Bulgaria are suffering energy crises so great as to make it difficult for them to keep the reactors closed. Armenia, embroiled in a long feud with its oil-rich neighbour Azerbaijan, has been blockaded and has difficulty importing oil, gas or coal. Last year the Kozloduy station provided almost half Bulgaria's electricity.

Western promises were made in the heady days after the collapse of communism of a massive infusion of money and know-how to enhance safety at the suspect power stations in the former countries of the Soviet bloc. But they have failed to materialise.

At the Munich summit in July 1992 of the Group of Seven leading industrial powers, the United States talked of a $20 billion programme to salvage the East's nuclear power stations and shut down those beyond redemption. The Germans mentioned $9 billion.

According to the European Commission, which was put in charge of co-ordinating the aid programme, between 600 and 700 million ecus have since been disbursed by the European Union, EU member states or the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. All that money has gone on first aid for the two most worrisome reactor types: the RBMK and the VVER-230.



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Democracy remains an Arab dream

COMMENT
David Hirst

LEBANON'S parliament overwhelmingly approved a constitutional amendment last month enabling President Elias Hrawi to extend his six-year term by three years.

A survey had earlier shown that most Lebanese opposed the extension, and most deputies had deplored changing the constitution for the sole purpose of keeping the incumbent in power.

Before the civil war, such tamperings would have provoked national crisis, for many Lebanese saw the slightest alteration of their political system, with its intricate inter-communal power-sharing arrangements, as a threat to the whole. Only after 15 years of bloodshed did the Maronite Christians accept modifications that reduced their dominance.

It was a nod from Syria's President Hafez Assad, pre-eminent in Lebanon since the end of the war, which caused the deputies to change their minds. But the Maronite Patriarch said the vote meant Lebanon's democracy — long hailed as the only one in the region — was on its deathbed. The Middle East was once seen as the world's most turbulent region. But with the end of the cold war, and great advances towards Arab-Israeli peace, the door seemed open for Arab peoples to take power for themselves. They didn't.

By the yardstick of the durability of oppressive, morally bankrupt regimes, the Arab world — for all the disaffection within its component states — must rank as the stablest of regions. King Hussein of Jordan, at 59, is the world's longest-serving ruler. Colonel Gadafy of Libya is the second-longest ruling Arab leader, with an astonishing 26-year rule, as weird as it has been absolute.

Presidents Assad, Saddam and Mubarak personify and perpetuate even older once "revolutionary" systems, while a King Fahd or King Hassan, not to mention a string of petty potentates in the oil-rich Gulf sheikhdoms, uphold an authoritarian monarchism.

Yet most pay lip service to the people's right to remove them. Even Saddam, most brutal, hated and catastrophic of Arab rulers, does that. Shaken by defections at the top, he has just staged his referendum — and he is hinting at further liberalisation. That is as improbable as the referendum was preposterous.

Two regimes — having liberalised under pressures that eventually took a violent, Islamist form — are instituting further repression even as they go through the motions of popular consultation.

The Egypt of Sadat and Mubarak liberalised very slowly. Mubarak's retreat from this liberalisation has likewise been slow. But, with new press and union laws, rejection of electoral reform and growing persecution of the non-violent Muslim Brotherhood opposition, it is enough to ensure that the few who bother to vote in this month's parliamentary elections will be joining an empty ritual.

Liberalisation by Algeria's military-backed regime after the food riots of 1988 was sudden and almost total. So was the retreat from it when, in 1992, it annulled parliamentary elections the Islamic Salvation Front was poised to win. Most authentic political forces are boycotting this month's presidential elections, which they see as trying to confer legitimacy on an illegitimate order.

Arab intellectuals constantly bemoan the scandalous fact that there is not a single healthy, modern democracy from the Atlantic to the Gulf, and that things are getting worse. They adduce many reasons, from the indigenous tribalism of Arab society to the West's support of any regime that is ready to do business with Israel.

Though certainly not the only cause of the Arab condition, Israel and the "peace process" embody its most painful irony. For not just Lebanon is "joining the gang" — Palestine is too.

No sooner did "President" Arafat go "home" than he began to build a "state" that, with its proliferating intelligence services, arbitrary arrests, trials and torture, will resemble nothing so much as another Arab autocracy. And, like most of them, it is destined to be sanctified by elections which he will seek to win by means at least as undemocratic as those of a Mubarak, if not yet a Saddam.

The Week in Britain James Lewis

Government forced to admit NHS rationing

A SECRET MEETING of civil servants and leading doctors yielded the belated — but at least honest — admission that rationing exists within the National Health Service. This was not entirely in line with a recent statement by the new Health Secretary, Stephen Dorrell, that he saw the NHS as "a universal provider of high-quality health", which encouraged users of the service to believe that nothing much has changed.

There has been growing evidence that, in many health regions, the culture of the NHS has changed; that the scope of services available to patients is now determined by accountants rather than doctors. The secret brainstorming session in London conceded the inevitability of rationing and sought to devise national guidelines as to which treatments should be allowable, and which should be given low priority.

One of the participants was Stephen Thornton, chief executive of Cambridge and Huntingdon Health Commission, which last year took the controversial decision to deny experimental treatment to an 11-year-old girl suffering from leukaemia. Her father, who secured a court order banning her identification so that she should not find out how ill she was, last week asked that the order be lifted so that she could be introduced to the press as Jaymee Bowen, a bouncy, vivacious child whose leukaemia is in remission and whose chances of survival were said to have increased from virtually nil to 30 per cent.

An anonymous donor had paid £75,000 for the treatment denied her by the NHS, and Jaymee's father is now talking of suing Mr Thornton and his authority for damages.

The rationing row was further inflamed by the North and Mid-Hampshire Health Commission, which told family doctors it would, no longer automatically pay for abortions for girls under 18. An official explained: "This is not rationing, it is keeping within budget." Most people could not see the distinction.

CHANNEL 5, Britain's last terrestrial TV network, was awarded amid controversy to Channel 5 Broadcasting, a consortium headed by Greg Dyke, a millionaire Labour supporter, and a Labour peer, Lord Hollick. Their bid of £22 million was not the highest, but two rivals were said to have been ruled out because of the quality of their programme plans.

UKTV, a company backed by the Canadian CanWest Global and Richard Branson's Virgin TV, is considering whether to make a legal challenge over the Independent Television Commission's rejection of its £36 million bid.

When Channel 5 goes on the air in 1997, viewers are promised more of the same — a five-night-a-week soap opera set in a hospital, a mid-evening news bulletin, and reruns of TV "classics" such as Dallas and The Sweeney. Yet the ITC criticised the losing bidders for their "lack of diversity" and too many repeats.

Before anybody can view anything, Channel 5 Broadcasting will have to spend £55 million visiting homes to retune an estimated 4 million video recorders — a project criticised as a "burglar's charter". Even when that is completed, some 30 per cent of the country will still miss out on the new channel.

JUDGE Stephen Tumim, the outspoken Chief Inspector of Prisons, who is retiring because his contract has not been renewed, delivered a blistering attack on the direction of penal policy which, he said, was "on the road to the concentration camp".

His target was General Sir John Learmont, who conducted the inquiry into escapes from Parkhurst prison and recommended the building of new and more secure prisons with tougher regimes. The general was "aiming to put security above humanity," said Judge Tumim.

What would happen, he asked, if a man was trying to climb the wall of one of the proposed prisons? "On the Learmont doctrine, what do you do? Shoot him?" It was a "very dangerous" doctrine to promulgate, and he hoped ministers would reject it.

A LABOUR CANDIDATE, targeted by Tory tabloid newspapers as a former South African terrorist "with blood on his hands," said he was ready to stand down if local voters felt he was damaging the party's election chances.

John Lloyd, parliamentary candidate for the marginal Tory seat of Exeter, admits supporting the campaign against apartheid but says he never condoned terrorism. And he has made no secret of the fact that, under duress, he gave evidence against other anti-apartheid campaigners, one of whom, John Harris, went to the gallows after a bomb killed a pensioner at Johannesburg railway station in 1964.

Mr Lloyd is under no pressure from his party to step aside.

BIDS were lodged for the first three British Rail franchises destined for privatisation — Great Western Trains, South-West Trains, and the London-Tilbury-Southend "misery line" — all of which are expected to be in private hands by the end of the year.

The bidders include organisations headed by Virginia Bottomley's brother and an active member of John Major's Huntingdon constituency. Without saying that it would renationalise the privatised railways, Labour managed to suggest that it would be unwise to buy shares in them.



Chequers invaders take protest to Chirac



Wave of protest . . . a demonstrator at Chequers PHOTO: DAVID SILLITOE

Gary Younge

ANTI-NUCLEAR campaigners invaded the grounds of the Prime Minister's official residence, Chequers, on Sunday to protest against French nuclear testing as President Jacques Chirac of France joined John Major for two days of talks.

In the first of a series of protests during the Anglo-French summit, members of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and Greenpeace defied a large police presence to urge Mr Major to "stand up to Mr Chirac" over nuclear testing.

But Mr Major stood firm and announced plans to "deepen" co-operation on nuclear weapons as he endorsed President Chirac's decision to conduct tests. He said: "We will not always agree on every point. Our nations are too independent, too proud, perhaps too individual to do that but our interests are inextricably linked."

France conducted the third of six planned nuclear tests in the South Pacific early on Saturday morning.

But the two countries were out of step on monetary union. President Chirac, who referred to Mr Major as "mon cher John", defended his decision to opt for a single currency and said that Britain could not stand on the sidelines.

Bonsoir, is that the Queen?

Ed Vulliamy

HER Majesty Queen Elizabeth II last week found herself discussing the referendum in Quebec with a disc jockey on Montreal's CKOI FM rock station, as a guest on the "Drive-In" show.

Pierre Brassard, comic and DJ, secured himself a place in the history by placing an on-air call to Her Majesty, pretending to be Canada's prime minister, Jean Chrétien.

"Ah, prime minister!", says a voice much chattier than that known to her subjects, "bonsoir!".

"The latest polls are saying the separatists are going to win the referendum on the independence of Quebec," warned the prime minister/aka Mr Brassard.

Her Majesty was perturbed. "It sounds as though the referendum may go the wrong way." But the 'PM' has a scheme: "Should your Majesty have the kindness to make a public intervention . . ." Yes, he would like her to speak on television.

"Do you think you could give me a text of what you would like me to say? It would have to be *moitié-moitié*, wouldn't it? Half English, half French?"

Buckingham Palace was not amused by the prank: "The fact that this person did get through is an irritant when the Queen has more important things to do," said a palace spokesman.

● For the first time as monarch, the Queen consented to travel on a scheduled commercial flight when she began a 10-day tour of New Zealand on Monday to attend the Commonwealth heads of government meeting. Her concession is at the request of the Wellington government, which said that she was "mindful of the cost".

Report damns police

David Hencke

A BITTER row broke out last week over the employment of more "bobbies on the beat" after a damning Audit Commission draft report into mismanagement and waste by police forces of their £4 billion a year budget.

Chief Constables, the Police Federation, and Labour and Liberal spokesmen warned they strongly disagreed with the Audit Commission's findings that "doubling or trebling the resources available for patrol would be unlikely to make a substantial impression".

Police organisations said that John Major's pledge to employ a further 5,000 policemen on the beat was essential because of the huge popularity of street patrols with the public.

Both the Police Federation and the Association of Chief Police Officers said they intended to seek to modify the Audit Commission's findings.

Fred Broughton, Police Federation national chairman, strongly defended patrolling officers. "A visible uniformed presence on the streets provides an effective deterrent against crime, a strong link with the community, and a high level of reassurance," he said.

Superintendent Brian Mackenzie, president of the Police Superintendents' Association, denied patrols were badly managed. "We have been managing patrolling officers far better than in the past," he said. "It does involve targeting of particular areas and briefings, and a lot of it is intelligence led. The impression given, of officers simply aimlessly wandering about doing nothing, is wrong.

"What's undeniable is that the public gets tremendous reassurance from the patrolling officer. And it's difficult, of course, to measure the crime he prevents."

Pollution tax likely in Budget

Paul Brown

DIESEL has been classed for the first time as a dirty fuel by the Government and is expected as a result to attract an extra "pollution" tax in the Budget to discourage its use.

Last week a new leaflet on winter smog, issued by the Department of the Environment, exhorted diesel car owners to leave their vehicles at home when air pollution is high. This is the first time diesel has been identified in this way, putting these vehicles in the same class as petrol cars without catalytic converters.

Less than five years ago diesel was being encouraged by the Government as "greener" than petrol. The fuel enjoys the same tax advantages as lead-free petrol. But in 1994 doubts surfaced about diesels, and the tiny dust particles produced in exhausts, and the Government began to change its mind about diesel being a desirable fuel.

Within the next few weeks a damning report on the health effects of particulates is expected to be released by the Department of Health.

The Treasury, which has already pledged to increase petrol prices as part of the Government's commitment to reduce carbon emissions, has been in talks with the Department of the Environment about possible further tax adjustments in the Budget.

Now that diesel is a big seller, with many new vehicles on the road, a "pollution tax" would be a big money earner.

'White list' to limit refugees

Alan Travis

BRITAIN is to slam the door on asylum seekers from Algeria, Nigeria, Sri Lanka and other countries on a new official "white list" of nations to be regarded as "safe" by the Home Secretary, Michael Howard, and deemed not to put refugees at risk.

The move is confirmed for the first time in a detailed Conservative Central Office briefing document drawn up for Tory MPs which outlines the immigration package expected this week.

The measures, to be contained in the new Asylum and Immigration Bill in the Queen's Speech on November 15, come on top of the withdrawal of £200 million in social security benefits from 50,000 asylum seekers and the planned abolition of asylum appeal oral hearings.

The fourth part of Mr Howard's package — to fine companies which employ illegal immigrants — is still stalled in Cabinet. Last week the Institute of Directors and the Confederation of British Industry warned that it could lead to further discrimination against ethnic minorities in the workplace.

The Conservative Central Office briefing says the introduction of the "white list" is among measures to speed up the process of making a final decision on an asylum claim, which can take up to 18 months. "Among them will be the designation of selected countries — there would be a presumption that applications from nationals of these countries would be unfounded." It says these countries "would be unlikely to produce genuine applicants".

It is believed that Algeria, Nigeria and Sri Lanka will feature on the first "white list". The latter two are Commonwealth countries.

So far this year more than 6,100 people have applied for asylum in Britain from these three countries which are, according to Amnesty, experiencing either civil war or widespread human rights abuses.

The legislation follows an admission from Andrew Lansley, the Conservative Central Office research director, that immigration as an issue for the Tories had played well in the 1992 general election.

Mr Howard justified his decision by saying: "We are seen as a very attractive destination because of the ease with which people can gain access to jobs and benefits. While the number of asylum seekers for the rest of Europe is falling, the number in this country is increasing. Only a tiny proportion of them are genuine refugees. . . . I want to make sure that genuine refugees get the sanctuary this country has always been proud to provide, but I believe that we must take firm action against bogus asylum seekers."

But opposition parties accused the Government of playing the race card, and Amnesty pointed to the number of applicants falling after a peak in 1991.

The number of asylum seekers being accepted in the EU has fallen in the past two years but the numbers are simply not comparable to those applying to enter Britain. For example, those entering Germany have fallen from 450,000 two years ago to 170,000 in the past year, against Britain's 40,000 applicants.

The Lib Dems' Alan Beith said that if the "white list" system had operated in the 1930s, Germany could still have been on a list of "safe" countries while Jewish refugees applied to enter Britain.

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Tory MPs told how to answer awkward questions on racism

THE Conservative Central Office confidential briefing note for Tory MPs, which details the expected package of immigration controls, assumes it will be attacked as racist and for breaching the United Nations Convention on Refugees, *writes Alan Travis.*

The briefing attempts to "tutor" MPs in how to answer the accusations in a simple question and answer guide which also details the changes.

It not only covers the new "white list" of "safe" countries from which asylum applications will not be accepted but also social security benefits cuts and the new public sector immigration checks to be carried out by headteachers, hospital admissions and others. Selected extracts from the briefing read:

Q: The United Nations Convention on Refugees requires the United Kingdom to give refugees staying on its territory the same treatment with regard to social security as is accorded to UK citizens. How do you reconcile that with these changes?

A: The convention applies only to *refugees*, not asylum seekers. The UK complies fully with its obligation under the UN convention. Once a person is recognised as a refugee, they have the same rights to benefits as any UK citizen.

Q: How do you expect people to pursue their right of appeal if you cut off their means of financial support?

A: All asylum applications will be treated seriously by the Home Office. Those who wish to appeal against a refusal of refugee status may still do so, either from within the UK or from abroad. How they choose to finance themselves during that appeal is a matter for the individuals themselves, not for the UK taxpayer.

Q: What about the genuine people who are stranded here by changes in their home country?

A: The Government recognises that there will, on occasions, be significant events that occur in someone's home country which prevent their return after they entered the United Kingdom for bona fide purposes. The Home Secretary will advise the Benefits Agency should such an upheaval take place.

Q: Will there be a repatriation fund to help these people get home?

A: No. Economic migrants have enough money to get here. Having failed to get around the immigration laws it would be wrong to hand out even more taxpayers' money to give them a free trip home again.

Q: This package is a licence for racism among public officials?

A: No. People from abroad, whether asylum seekers or other visitors, are already identified in claims to income support and housing benefit. This package simply extends the need for identification.

MPs rethink marriage law

Rebecca Smithers and Patrick Wintour

THE Government last week agreed to look again at plans to increase the rights of unmarried partners after an 11th-hour protest from its backbench MPs who claimed they would undermine the status of marriage.

The Family Home and Domestic Violence Bill, due to be debated in the Commons this week, is to be postponed for a week and possibly dropped altogether to allow the Lord Chancellor to consider the Tory protests.

The bill had swept through Parliament virtually unnoticed with all-party support, until it became apparent in the small print that an unmarried person proving mental cruelty would be able to evict his or her partner and claim the contents of a home.

The main thrust of the Law Commission-sponsored bill is to give female council tenants — whether married or not — the right to stay in a property if it can be proved they have been the victim of domestic violence.

But rightwing Tory MPs, including Ann Winterton, Edward Leigh, Roger Gale and Lady Olga Maitland, were worried that girlfriends would be able to take over their partner's house or flat, and that this would act as a disincentive to marriage.

The backbenchers' success in forcing ministers to review the bill overshadowed the potentially more damaging backbench protests about government plans to relax divorce laws in the forthcoming Divorce Bill, and which are being opposed by broadly the same group of people.

The Cabinet pledged to press ahead with the Divorce Bill, which will be announced in the Queen's Speech on November 15, but the Lord Chancellor, Lord Mackay, has admitted that it could "come a cropper". Tory whips are under pressure to grant MPs a free vote on the issue.

The aim is to end the notion of divorce based on fault, substituting a minimum one-year delay before divorces come through. This would mean an end to divorces after a two- or five-year separation and an end to "quickie" divorces for reasons such as adultery or unreasonable behaviour.

One of the three Tory backbench amendments has been tabled by Julian Brazier (Canterbury), Mrs Winterton (Congleton) and her husband, Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield).

It would seek to limit the bill's provisions on property rights to cohabitees with children. The other two amendments, tabled by Mr Gale (Thanet N), are also designed to limit the bill's scope.

Labour's legal affairs spokesman, Paul Boateng, commented last week: "That [the bill] should have been nobbled in the name of the family is a grotesque parody of family values and undermines the Government's battered credibility still further."

The Prime Minister moved swiftly to underline the Conservatives' reputation as a party committed to marriage and family values after the embarrassing retreat.

Defending the Lord Chancellor, Lord Mackay, against allegations that he may have misjudged the mood of MPs unhappy about the Family Homes and Domestic Violence Bill, John Major cited the roles of other bodies involved in the legislation, notably the Law Commission, which sponsored it.

"If the Lord Chancellor misjudged the mood, so did everyone else when it went through the House of Commons and the Lords earlier," Mr Major insisted.

"To lay this at the door of the Lord Chancellor, who is one of the most civilised, decent and humane men I know, is not accurate."

He stated that if there was a misjudgment, then "it wasn't simply the Lord Chancellor. It must have been the Law Commission who proposed the bill, it must have been everyone who examined the bill when it went through the Commons and the Lords, up until the last minute."

Mr Major said the Conservative party believed in the institution of marriage, and it was only right that Lord Mackay should examine the concerns about the bill.

"The party has been the party of the family for as long as everyone can remember. What we are concerned about is the institution of marriage, shoring up the institution of marriage."

Pressed on whether he intended forging ahead with the Divorce Bill, Mr Major simply said: "We will announce the Queen's Speech programme in due course."

● Michael Heseltine, the Deputy Prime Minister, is to undergo an operation for kidney stones at the London Clinic later this month and will probably miss the Queen's Speech debate.

Tate wins lottery grant

Rebecca Smithers and Larry Elliott

THE transformation of the dilapidated Bankside power station in London into a new Tate Gallery, with a grant of £50 million from lottery funds, was chosen on Monday as the third Landmark project to mark the millennium as new political differences emerged over how individuals might benefit from the fund.

Other major grants announced by the Millennium Commission included almost £12 million to restore Rochdale canal, grants to two major forestry projects totalling £11 million, and £7.5 million to put the collections of more than 200 Scottish museums and galleries on to CD-Roms accessible at every school.

Virginia Bottomley, the Heritage Secretary, who chairs the commission, on Monday sketched out how individuals might win new millennium bursaries from National Lottery funds which have so far been devoted only to capital projects.

The awards, on offer to people of all ages, would not be "primarily about an individual furthering his or her own intellectual skills or economic capacity" but linked to "wider community benefits and fellowship".

There has been sharp criticism from other regions of a perceived bias in lottery grants towards the South-east, including the controversial grants to the Royal Opera House at Covent Garden, and towards rebuilding Sadler's Wells. The Millennium Commission was careful to stress that the Tate grant is only its second grant to London — a £2.2 million grant to London Zoo was announced last month.

In a debate last week sponsored by Labour, Mrs Bottomley defended the lottery as a "dream machine" and branded the opposition killjoys for wanting to make it non-profit-making.

Labour's motion calling for a Lottery Consumers Council and a fairer distribution of funds was defeated by 302 votes to 264.

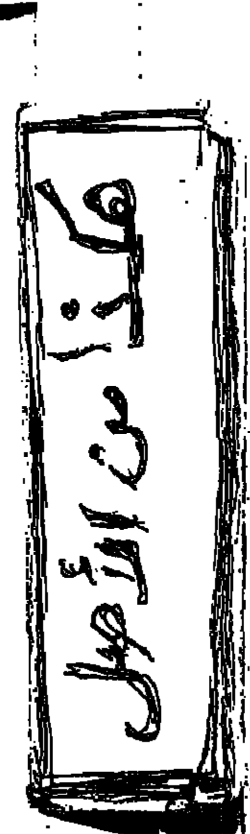
The debate, initiated by Labour, came after church leaders warned that the lottery could start a gambling epidemic, hitting the poor and the vulnerable, and after rows over awards to charities and arts bodies.

Jack Cunningham, making his debut at the despatch box as shadow national heritage secretary, strongly attacked the lottery operator, Camelot, for excess profit making, which he said was in the region of £1 million a week and rising.

A Labour government would improve the distribution of funds, and ensure that when a new contract was due for the operation of the lottery, it would be on a not-for-profit basis, he said.

Addressing criticisms, Mrs Bottomley said she would look at some of the regional imbalances in the hand-outs, but rejected church leaders' call for a cap on prizes. She said no evidence had been found "that the National Lottery has introduced excessive gambling behaviour".

To jeers from the opposition benches, Mrs Bottomley rejected calls for prize-capping and said the lottery had been a "tremendous" success which Labour's approach would ruin. "Labour would harm tens of thousands of retailers. They would thwart popular ambition. They would rob good causes of hundreds of millions of pounds in the pursuit of ideology."





In Brief

AT LEAST five criminal cases have been halted in the past three years because judges decided that media coverage would make a fair trial impossible, the Attorney General, Sir Nicholas Lyell revealed.

DOCTORS reported two cases of the fatal brain illness Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease in a girl of 16 and boy of 18, both of whom died, but say there is no obvious link to BSE — mad cow disease. Three farmers have died from the disease and a fourth is seriously ill. A farmer's wife and a businessman are the latest suspected victims.

RAIL passenger groups expressed anger that Lord Sterling, the P&O chairman, had escaped paying a BR penalty fare to save him embarrassment.

CLARE SHORT, a leftwing member of the shadow cabinet, bowed to the principle of collective responsibility and apologised to the party leader, Tony Blair, for her call for a fresh debate on the decriminalisation of cannabis. Earlier, drug law reformers condemned the jailing of the son of the former Liberal leader Sir David Steel for nine months after he pleaded guilty to growing cannabis with an alleged value of £30,000.

CHRIS Patten, the Hong Kong governor, said the Government had rejected his appeal for 7,000 Indians living in the colony, who could be made stateless when China takes over in 1997, to be allowed to resettle in Britain.

REPRESENTATIVES of the Rev Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church are considering taking legal action following the decision by the Home Secretary to ban the Moonies' leader from entering Britain.

THE Northern Ireland Secretary, Sir Patrick Mayhew, gave the peace process a shot in the arm when he rushed through Parliament a bill that will release more than 90 convicted terrorists before Christmas.

THE former wife of one of the world's wealthiest men, German industrialist Friedrich Flick, has won leave to appeal against a $14 million divorce award — the biggest yet in an English court — because she claims it is not enough to live on.

BRITAIN ordered the expulsion of an Iraqi diplomat said to have targeted exiled fellow countrymen opposed to Saddam Hussein.

THE National Union of Students called on the Government to ban the extremist Islamic group Hizb-ut-Tahrir after evidence that it had begun a campaign of intimidation and violence in British colleges.

Tories slash housing benefit

Michael White

NEW government regulations designed to save up to £400 million a year by clamping down on housing benefit payments will make it virtually impossible for vulnerable tenants such as the elderly, the sick and poor families to qualify for extra help on the grounds of exceptional hardship.

According to a draft text of Department of Social Security guidance, leaked last week to the Guardian, local councils can expect as little as £6,000 a year to make discretionary awards above their so-called "permitted total" of housing benefit funds.

"The Permitted Total is an absolute limit," the draft says. "Any discretionary payment that is made, either by housing benefit staff or a review board, which takes expenditure above the Permitted Total, would be unlawful."

Labour said the "draconian" proposals were further proof of the Government's lurch to the right ahead of the election campaign.

The circular, drawn up to implement the new Social Security Administration Act, advises housing officials to invoke the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary's definition of exceptional ("forming an exception; unusual") and of hardship ("severe suffering; extreme privation") in deciding whether to make discretionary payments to tenants of private landlords.

In the past, so-called vulnerable groups, pensioners, the sick and disabled, and families with children had special protection. "To get through these hoops, you'll have to be half-dead," one Labour housing expert said.

The Government plans prompted angry exchanges between John Major and Tony Blair, with the Labour leader denouncing the Tory "lurch to the right" and the Prime Minister accusing Labour of wanting to restore rent controls.

At question time Mr Blair argued that Mr Major had abandoned "one-nation Conservatism", and demanded that the Government stopped "using vulnerable and innocent tenants" as "pawns to clear up a mess of the Government's own making".

Mr Major accused Labour of ducking difficult decisions on spending control. "You said you were in favour of hand-ups, not hand-outs, and your party has said they want to take a very radical look at the whole system of social security . . . yet whenever there is a difficult decision to be made they will oppose it."

Patrick Wintour adds: The scale of backbench Conservative pressure on the Cabinet to slash spending in the November budget was later laid bare when John Townend, chairman of the Tory backbench finance committee, called for a massive £7 billion cut in government spending.

Warning ministers that "the witching hour" fast approached, Mr Townend, a key figure on the populist right, said the next election would be lost if the Budget did not meet the needs of Middle England and Tory supporters.

Chancellor Kenneth Clarke had been looking at a tax-cutting package worth £2.5 billion, but Mr Townend demanded far more radical surgery based on £7 billion of tax cuts this year, and a similar package next year.

● Britain's social security system will take a critical pounding from Brussels this week with the publication of a report showing the unemployed receive a much worse deal than in any of the other main industrial states of the European Union.

The report says those out of work in Britain receive proportionately less in benefits than in any other EU member state except Greece and Ireland.

Court awards £65,000 in asbestos case

Clare Dyer and Martin Wainwright

THE High Court last week opened the way for compensation claims by dozens of people who contracted a rare cancer after an asbestos factory polluted their neighbourhood more than 40 years ago.

Mr Justice Holland ordered the multinational engineering company T&N to pay £65,000 compensation to June Hancock, a Leeds payroll manageress given two years to live when she was diagnosed last year as suffering from mesothelioma.

Mrs Hancock was exposed to asbestos dust as a child between 1938 and 1951 when she lived and played next to a factory owned by the T&N subsidiary, J W Roberts, in Armley, Leeds. A second claimant, Evelyn Margereson, was awarded £50,000 compensation for the death of her husband, Arthur, from mesothelioma in 1991 at the age of 66. He had also lived near the factory as a child.

The test cases open the way for 40 others who developed asbestos-related illnesses after exposure to asbestos dust near the factory, which closed in 1958. Some 200 people from Leeds have so far died of mesothelioma, but there are other clusters, particularly around dockyards. Cases in the past have mainly involved workers, such as dockers or factory hands, rather than people living near factories.

Asbestos litigation worldwide has proved a nightmare for the insurance industry. Massive claims, particularly in the US, have contributed to the debacle at Lloyd's of London.

Epidemiologists predict the worst is yet to come. There is an incubation period of 10 to 50 years for mesothelioma — caused only by asbestos exposure — and the number of cases diagnosed in Britain has been rising. It stands at about 1,000 a year.

Professor Julian Peto, of the Institute of Cancer Research, believes the number of deaths will peak at 3,000 by the year 2024.

In 1993, T&N — formerly Turner & Newall — set aside nearly £150 million to meet claims in the US and Britain. This week the Chase Manhattan Bank in New York is taking T&N to court seeking £117 million damages over the use of asbestos in its headquarters in 1959.

Lawyers in the Leeds case faced the task of proving that the company knew of the risks from exposure to asbestos dust in the 1940s and 1950s. But Chase Manhattan Bank made available thousands of documents which provided damning evidence, showing that T&N knew in 1943 that asbestos was dangerous.

Rosemary West 'fell for Fred's lies'

Duncan Campbell

JUST before noon on Monday in court No. 3 of Winchester crown court, Rosemary West left the dock where she has been sitting for the 16 days of her trial and made her way to the witness box.

She swore on the Bible to tell the whole truth and went on to give evidence for nearly three hours, breaking down in tears periodically and wiping her eyes underneath her spectacles. A packed public gallery, some of whom had brought picnic hampers, listened enthralled.

Until that moment, no one had known if she would exercise her right not to give evidence. Her decision to go into the box yielded an account of the persuasiveness, charm and violence of her husband Fred.

She knew nothing of the deaths of the 10 young women and girls with whose murders she is charged, she told the court, because she and her husband had ended up living separate lives.

She described how she had been raped twice as a teenager, abandoned by her mother after her parents had split up, and sought in West the love she lacked elsewhere. "When he was good, he was very very good," she said. But during their marriage he had changed into a workaholic who forced her to have sex with other men and to have lesbian relationships.

Mrs West, aged 41, told the jury her life history. She told her barrister, Richard Ferguson QC, that she was about 14 when she first had sexual intercourse. Not long after she had gone to a Christmas party and been abandoned by the people meant to be giving her a lift home. She had "very reluctantly" accepted a lift with a man who had been watching her throughout the party. "I thought he was going to kill me."

"What did he do?" Mr Ferguson asked. "He raped me."

Her parents had separated for around six months, when she was aged 15. During that time she had lived with a man aged around 30, and had had sex with him.

While waiting for a bus home one day a man had started "chatting her up". She said: "I wasn't interested but he was very forcible. I was just hoping the bus would come along." But the man, whom she believed to be a soldier, was very strong and had dragged her into the park and raped her. As she recounted the story, she wept.

Soon after she met Frederick West. He had told her he was married and looking after two little girls. "I got on well with the children," she said. "I loved them straight away."

Rosemary West giving evidence

She became pregnant and her "shocked" parents threatened to contact the authorities because she had been under-age.

"He promised me the world, he promised me everything. Because I was so young I fell for his lies. He promised to love me and care for me and I fell for it," she said.

"Fred could be very persuasive, very intimidating. He could charm the birds out of the trees, literally. He had the gift of the gab."

Mrs West's evidence continues.

UK worst in rich and poor divide

Richard Thomas in Paris

THE gap between rich and poor grew more quickly in Britain during the 1980s than in any other industrialised country, according to the first study of comparable income trends, published last week.

The study, commissioned by the free-market Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, shows that while the United States is the most unequal nation in the developed world, Britain is catching up fast. During the 1980s, the share of national income going to the poorest fifth of the population fell from more than 9 per cent to 7 per cent. At the same time, the most affluent fifth enjoyed a 43 per cent slice of the cake — up from 36 per cent at the start of the first Thatcher administration.

The main measures of inequality used in the study increased three times as much for Britain as for Scandinavian and Benelux countries between the late 1970s and mid to late 1980s, while France and Germany saw no increase in the gap between rich and poor.

"This report confirms what many of us have known in our bones for a long time," Chris Smith, Labour's Social Security spokesman.

The main author of the report, Professor Tony Atkinson, said the survey showed a high proportion of benefit spending — more than a quarter — went to the poorest fifth of the British population. But this might simply be a reflection of the depth of need among this group, he said.

One of the factors behind the growth in inequality in many of the 25 OECD states was a collapse in demand for unskilled labour which pushed down wages and increased unemployment, while well-educated employees' salaries increased.

Another factor was growing returns on savings and investments, which had benefited affluent households most. The report suggests that the sale of state assets, particularly in Britain, may have fuelled this trend.

Lure of the East, page 13

The West can't bank on Boris

THE RUMOURS about Boris Yeltsin's health, and possibly his death, began to fly almost as soon as the news flashed around the world last month that he had again been rushed to hospital. Reassuring statements from the Kremlin that his condition was not as serious as the July emergency failed to convince: after all last summer it took several days — and the publication of an obviously faked "good health" photograph — before Yeltsin's entourage was made to acknowledge that their man had been quite seriously incapacitated by serious heart trouble. Old-fashioned Kreminology is being taken out of the moth balls. Where health matters are concerned, we are back to the unreconstructed communist past. Just as the Kremlin claimed that President Andropov had a cold when he was in reality dying, or that Brezhnev was in full command of his faculties when he could barely stand up, so we have been told for months that Yeltsin is — for most of the time — in fine fettle, and fit not only to run his country but also to stand next year for re-election as Russia's president.

So far the West has been prepared to play this game on Russia's terms, humouring Yeltsin and banking on his ability to stay the course even though the evidence of their own eyes and ears leaves little doubt that Yeltsin, in or out of hospital, is a sick man. Only last week at the Roosevelt family's home at Hyde Park the ageing Russian bear gave an embarrassingly clumsy performance: his movements were awkward, his speech slurred and his remarks were embarrassingly vacuous. Publiciy the Americans insisted that Yeltsin had been in fine form; privately they acknowledged that there was cause for concern for Russia's future, for its lurch to the right, for its treaty commitments and for its relations with the outside world.

Even if Yeltsin is soon able to return to his desk, Washington and its allies must now firmly fix their eyes on Russia beyond Boris. Almost every scenario ahead has rival factions competing for power, and to establish their nationalist credentials. Political instability ahead is a certainty; at issue is only how severe it will be and whether a leader can emerge capable of holding the Russian federation together. Among those vying for the succession, the prime minister, Viktor Chernomyrdin, has the highest international profile. But at home he is a controversial figure with powerful opponents in the security apparatus. Few outsiders have met the popular General Aleksandr Lebed whose "clean" credentials appear to have such wide appeal in Russia. If Americans can look to General Colin Powell as presidential material, why should Russians not turn to General Lebed? Who knows: perhaps the two superpowers will end up with elected military men at their helms.

Nuclear disasters waiting to happen

AFICIONADOS of Armenian history may know that Metsamor is a village considered to have been the birthplace of the Armenian people. Today Metsamor matters to all of us, not because of its history but because it has a perilous nuclear plant whose reactors have just been activated against the advice of every western expert familiar with its construction. The International Atomic Energy Authority in Vienna has begged and hectored earthquake-prone Armenia not to restart reactors already closed down once, in 1989, for safety concerns. The plant does not even have a sarcophagus to act as a shield against leaks. The Armenian capital, Yerevan, is at risk. But so are more distant countries, Britain included. Armenian officials, unimpressed, argue that the country cannot live through another winter without adequate supplies of energy, and that in any case, western protests are suspect because they are motivated by commercial considerations to secure business for some of the commercial giants in search of lucrative contracts to repair faulty reactors.

Metsamor is only the newest recruit to the Chernobyl syndrome; indeed Chernobyl itself remains dangerously defective and poses risks every bit as great as the nuclear fall-out in 1986. Also among the front runners for red alert are Kozloduy in Bulgaria, Kola in north-western Russia and Ignalina in Lithuania. Study after study has shown that these are accidents waiting to happen. Western experts assert that the best course is to shut the plants down; failing that, safety devices must be reinforced.

The standard response from the countries concerned has been to argue that they lack resources both to deal with the defaults or to develop alternative energy resources. Either the rich industrialised countries come up with funds and expertise, or they must accept the risks that nuclear accidents in the East hold for the health and well-being of the wider world. The dilemma is not new. The G7 countries and the EU have been agonising about this for almost a decade; but have been inexcusably slow in taking decisive action. One reason is that the sums involved run into billions. But another is competition to do the work between the US, Japan and the EU countries and between the nuclear industry's giants, such as Westinghouse, Siemens and GEC. Instead of pulling together to draw up a master plan of action, there has been endless bickering, and less than $700 million has been committed so far.

This is irresponsibility of the highest degree. Public opinion has been rightly outraged by French nuclear tests in the South Pacific. But it is just as important to realise that it is high noon for the Chernobyls of the former Soviet Republic and of Eastern Europe. The international community must take preventive action before Metsamor and its ilk go down in history not as obscure places on the map but as disasters affecting mankind.

The politics of red meat

LET US get some necessary disclaimers on the record first. No, Britain cannot have an open door immigration system. No, asylum seekers cannot be exempt from control. Yes, Britain must have the right to decide between genuine claims and false ones. And yes, false claims should be rejected.

But then let us get this question into perspective. Yes, there is a mounting refugee problem in the world. Yes, modern communications make it easier for refugees to travel huge distances to seek asylum and impose inevitable burdens upon the countries the refugees seek to enter. But no, the dangers of Algeria, Sri Lanka and many others are not imagined. No, it is not good enough to respond to the phenomenon by each nation barring its doors. No, the burdens faced by the "host" countries cannot be seriously spoken of in the same breath as the burdens faced by those who seek to enter them. No, Britain is not a "magnet" for the rootless and wretched of the world, as even the most cursory study of European, and in particular of German, responses to such movements of population would prove beyond doubt. No, Britain's laws are not more lax than those of comparable countries. And yes, Michael Howard is fanning these issues into flame for purely party political reasons. He is playing the race card and as a recent descendant of refugee immigrants he ought to be ashamed of himself — and doubtless would be, if a capacity for embarrassment formed any part of his character.

The only reason why we are about to have another Immigration and Asylum Bill is because it is deemed to be politically advantageous to the Conservative party's electoral prospects. It is the same reason why there has been such an endless succession of Criminal Justice Acts in recent years. It is because Central Office believes — and sadly has some reason to believe — that undecided voters are attracted by red meat solutions, whether in policing, sentencing or race. The whole thing is motivated above all by the hope that Labour will vote against it, so that Mr Howard can then say that Labour is soft on crime or soft on blacks.

It is one of the most reprehensible political strategies in our recent political life, and the more so for being so flagrant. The stories in the Conservative house journals last week attempted to present Mr Howard as triumphing over Cabinet opposition in order to bring in a battery of repressive workplace checks on refugee status — an incentive for white employers to discriminate against black and Asian job applicants. In fact, almost the reverse of the tales is true; Mr Howard has failed to persuade the Cabinet to bring in the worst measures he had in mind. But the Home Secretary is still set upon plans which would reduce any workplace employing people of certain ethnic types into places of fear and suspicion. Our race relations are not perfect, but they will be safer if his nasty schemes are firmly and publicly resisted.

Nationalism hastens Canada's great divide

Martin Woollacott

ONE OF the most persistent modern illusions has been that modernisation militates against nationalism. As people became more alike in their habits, as distances shrank, as economic organisation crossed political boundaries, the argument went, then national and ethnic difference would dwindle. No stronger champions of this view used to be found than Canadians.

This week they stand confounded, for the Canada they wanted to create, the Canada of Pierre Elliott Trudeau, is a lost cause. Something different may succeed in keeping the country more or less together, but it will not be Trudeau's strong Canada, based on bilingualism and multi-culturalism, attracting the primary loyalties of all its citizens. But if Canadians are confounded, so are the rest of us, because nothing is clearer now than that modernisation pumps up nationalism rather than deflates it. National separation in Eastern Europe could, neverthless, be put down to the legacy of oppressive political structures.

But in Canada, what Anglo-Canadian arrogance there was had become a memory by the seventies, the British empire was an even more distant bit of history, and if there was a great power to guard against, it was the US — a good reason for French and English Canadians to stay together rather than the reverse.

Optimists may still hope that Canada can be the pioneer of the management of separation, and the limitation of the damage that it can cause. The Canadian historian William H McNeill, arguing that the multi-ethnic polity is the norm in human history and the homogeneous nation the unsustainable exception, wrote a few years ago that: "Canadian and American experience gives North America something of a head start in the awkward matter of getting used to living side by side with people of differing ethnic heritage." That head start led, unhappily, to the Quebec referendum and to a black march on Washington led by a man committed in theory to a separatist path for African-Americans.

Some would say that a mere vote cannot alter geography. Quebec remains where it is, as does English Canada. They have to have economic, social, cultural relations. They have common interests. Quebec is, after all, governed by a separatist party and its men in Ottawa are mainly delegates of another separatist party. It already calls its parliament a national assembly, has a foreign service in all but name, a flag, an anthem, a national holiday. So what difference does the vote make? The answer is that most people are not geographers or political scientists, and that it makes a huge and possibly rancorous difference.

Trudeau said of the Quebec of the forties in which he grew up that "it was living outside modern times". The modernisation that later came to Quebec displaced the church and the English Canadian merchant élite, popularised French culture, upgraded Quebec French. Radio and television fertilised a new nationalism: it was not an accident that René Levesque was a journalist and a television personality. The irony of this modernisation was that it stripped away what had protected the old society, and having made it naked, had to devise new protections, taking the form of demands for independence or autonomy. But both French and English Canada were parting company with old traditions at about the same time.

English Canada's departure, ironically, conscripted the French fact as part of its new identity. Under the superficially uniting rubric of official biculturalism and bilingualism, English Canadian nationalism was taking a centralising direction while Quebec nationalism was taking the opposite route. On the question of the powers and prestige of the centre, there was thus a division.

Both English Canada and Quebec were struggling with a common problem, how to survive in a threatening world, their misfortune being that they could never agree on a common solution. Canadian politics has not just been dominated by the issue. It has been subsumed by it. The collapse of the Canadian Conservative Party would not have happened if Brian Mulroney had pulled off either the Meech Lake or the Charlottetown constitutional deals. Jean Chrétien's victory would, equally, have been unimaginable if English Canadians had not seen in him a man who, being both a French Canadian and a Canadian patriot in the Trudeau succession, could rescue the situation.

The fact is that at the end of all the wrangling and the negotiations, there appears no conceivable way out except to institutionalise the existing separation.

NATIONALISM so often works against national interest. If nationhood means the ability to control your own affairs, then the most important political fact in North America is the power of the US, which continues, without malice, to break down the economic, political and cultural differences it finds in the smaller and weaker states around it.

Quebec's failure to recognise this has long enraged English Canadians. Indeed, the North American Free Trade Agreement may well have helped the Quebec nationalist cause, by convincing some that there would be no great economic cost to independence, that they would be safe in a new Naftaland.

Quebec thinks that it can outmanoeuvre the American giant, the Canadian political scientist Philip Resnick has argued, but it is mistaken. "They might think that language and culture were some sort of shield against American influence . . ." he wrote, "but they would be in for a rude awakening." His solution, perhaps still available, is for a loose Canada-Quebec Union. The British politician Charles Wentworth Dilke, writing of Canada in the year of confederation, said that: "Like men standing on the edge of a cliff, Canadian statesmen are always wanting to jump off." The Canadian quandary that all must ponder is that in the understandable attempt to guard identity, societies can divest themselves of real protection in exchange for a separateness whose benefits may prove fleeting.

Should Britain become the Asian tiger of Europe? **Will Hutton** says the Government has got it facts badly wrong, while **Andrew Higgins** reports from Hong Kong on the reality behind the economic success story

Tory fantasy of far eastern promise

IT WAS an important week. It set the seal on the Conservative party's decisive move to the right that began with John Major's resignation in July and is now largely complete. The new right embraces easily the most rightwing ideological position since the war; a high-risk gamble, but in the current circumstances the least bad option.

The party — creature and ally of the British state throughout its history — has declared war on the very institution that made it. A new iron has entered Conservatism's soul. The liberal, one-nation wing has joined the Redwood/Portillo right in regarding lower public expenditure not merely as a means of lowering taxes, but of reinventing Britain as an Asian-style success story.

The extraordinary growth rates of the "Asian tiger" economies — Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, South Korea, Thailand, Malaysia — are said to have been built upon a small state with minimal public expenditure, light regulation and low taxation. Britain must follow their example.

The minimal state is not just a preoccupation of those who believe in curbing the state's size for ideological ends; it is seen as the route to prosperity and growth. The redefinition of priorities does not stop there. Britain must reorganise its trade and foreign policy to be less Eurocentric and concentrate on building trade and diplomatic links with these new Asian markets. This requires, as a minimum, a semi-detached relationship with over-regulated Europe. This is the foreign policy position which Malcolm Rifkind announced in Blackpool. A crushing argument is used with doubters: globalisation and competition makes any other course impossible.

Euroscepticism and the urge to find pre-election tax cuts are integrated into a wider Conservative view of the world; even the one-nation wing finds it difficult to dissent from this. Last week one of the great (if slightly used) battle-cruisers of the Conservative left, the Governor of Hong Kong and ex-chairman of the party, Chris Patten, gave it his thoughtful imprimatur.

Yet no serious inquiry into the origins of Asian growth supports the Conservative thesis. Asian growth has not turned on low government spending, but rather on high investment and saving ratios, nearly twice as large as anywhere else in the world. Cheap and plentiful investment capital is the most important determinant of growth everywhere, not just in Asia. Low government spending did not deliver such high saving and investment rates; almost everywhere, these result from government action — savings are compulsory and governments ensure that the savings are used for industrial and commercial investment. In South Korea, Thailand, Malaysia, Taiwan and even Singapore the government has gone even further — directly starting industrial enterprises while protecting and sponsoring others.

Studies from distinguished social scientists and business analysts, including the LSE's Professor Ronald Dore, Robert Wade at the Institute of Development Studies, Japanologist James Abbelgen and, most recently, Francis Fukuyama report the same phenomena — even if they stress different aspects. Asian capitalism is dynamic in part because it is more long-term in its outlook since it depends less on Anglo-Saxon-style stock markets; in part because of the role of vigorous company networks, often underpinned by families, in securing a steady base load of orders and mutual support for individual firms; in part because an enabling state backs young firms, provides cheap credit, constructs chains of suppliers and stimulates the use of new technology. Even a study by the World Bank conceded that the state had often been central to generating growth. Surprisingly, it also concluded that equality stabilised growth.

The intervention has been market-friendly and the governments firmly committed to capitalism. But to equate Asian success with the minimal state is wrong — as anybody familiar with Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew, South Korea's generals or Japan's extensive system of administrative guidance would bear testimony. There is cut-throat competition and pursuit of profit — but the cultural and social context is very different to that imagined by the Conservatives. Charles Hampden Turner, co-author of the Seven Cultures Of Capitalism, argues Asian capitalism (and Japanese in particular) shares its approach to competition with the martial arts tradition; the idea is not to knock your opponent out and establish monopoly dominance but to recognise his value in providing competition. If he is in trouble, you stand back to let him recover. This is not the Tory concept of competitive capitalism.

And can those double digit growth rates continue — dependent as they are on ready access to the US market, vast social dislocation and environmental degradation?

Asian growth rates, although high, have begun to subside. Professor Paul Krugman of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology argues that such growth was the result of "perspiration rather than inspiration" — it forced people into factories, depleting the labour pool. This could only be done once. As the costs of environmental degradation catch up, the growth rates will slow; more so as it becomes clear that the foundations of growth — suppressing demands for decent living standards and working conditions from newly industrial workforces, often through banning trade unions and military intervention — are neither sustainable nor tolerable. Ralph Dahrendorf stresses this: success has been delivered by a social authoritarianism that is anathema to western liberal democracies.

Yet to a Conservative party increasingly attracted to social authoritarianism, this is a positive merit. The old right likes the idea of further limitation of trades union rights, the regulation of sexual relations to curb single parents, the introduction of corporal and even capital punishment, and the elimination of "dependency culture" by allowing the poor to suffer the consequences of being poor. This process has been under way for some years, and Michael Howard at the Home Office and Peter Lilley at Social Security are taking it further.

THE ULTIMATE Conservative fantasy — privatising the state — is now being given extra ideological edge by the foredoomed attempt to emulate the Asians. The state, even in Asia, has played a more creative role than Conservatives allow. Cuts in public spending will have a depressive rather than stimulating impact on economic activity. Economic management is a more subtle art than a rolling back of the state and a celebration of price stability; and capitalism is a more subtle system than free-market theorists imagine. It needs to be managed, as the Asians have proved.

And there is a larger question of values. Social authoritarianism and purposeful neglect of the living conditions of the majority have no parallel in British cultural and political traditions. Britain pioneered religious tolerance, stood as a first custodian of universal human rights, threw over repression as a means of social and political regulation and curbed the excesses of capitalism.

The Conservative party has lost its bearings if it thinks Britain could become an independent global actor. Given its historical claim on power this could yet be very dangerous, for both the British state and society.



By the right . . . Chris Patten and Malcolm Rifkind in London for talks on Hong Kong PHOTO: MARTIN ARGLES

The stairway to heaven?

WU SU-CHING is a paragon of the Confucian-Victorian ethic. She gets up at 5am, works hard all day, cooks for her husband, helps support two jobless sons and receives nothing from the state. She spends not a cent on pleasure: not once has she indulged in dim sum promised in neon by a restaurant just outside her door.

What better example of the diligence and thrift that drive Asia's economic miracle — and inspire admiration from the Conservative party? But there is a problem. Mrs Wu, aged 63, collects cardboard boxes for a living; for 15 years her home has been an insect-infested concrete staircase off a Kowloon backstreet; she sleeps on plywood boards on a first-floor landing. The same space is her living room, dining room and kitchen. Her father lived and died on the same staircase.

Her husband, who has occasional work at a laundry, sleeps one flight up. Hanging from leaky pipes or jammed against the filthy concrete wall are the rewards of much hard work — a few plastic buckets, carrier bags stuffed with rags and a charcoal burner.

Away from Hong Kong's business district live thousands of such people — a minority, yet an underclass stuck as stubbornly at the bottom as any created by the European welfare state. Hong Kong does have a safety net. But, as factories move into China in search of cheap labour and low rents, leaving more middle-aged, elderly and uneducated people without work, it cannot cope. An Oxfam study estimated that at least 15 per cent of Hong Kong's 6 million people live in poverty. The gap between rich and poor is widening.

A day before Chris Patten's speech to the Conservative Political Centre in London, the South China Morning Post's front page was devoted to a survey showing economic confidence in the colony was at a 10-year low: "A tidal wave of economic pessimism is sweeping through the territory, with the public in its darkest mood for a decade."

Unemployment has increased to 3.5 per cent, the highest in 11 years.

The Asian model was never as trim as its champions claim. In much of the region, basic commodities are subsidised and investment is "guided". This is less so in Hong Kong, once described by Milton Friedman as a close approximation of pure capitalism. But even here, the model is often a myth; 40 per cent of the population live in council flats; 10 per cent more have bought subsidised property built by the HK Housing Authority.

Hong Kong has much to boast about. Gross Domestic Product per head increased by more than three times from 1966-94 and now stands at almost £14,000. But just as Asia's "tigers" are being praised in London, pressure is growing in Hong Kong, and elsewhere, for more state help.

Politics propels the change. After 150 years of colonial rule, Hong Kong got its first fully-elected legislature in September. The public can now speak for itself, instead of through an assembly of picked grandees. They chose candidates promising to stand up for their interests, against both China and big business.

"In the past, opinion was dominated entirely by the government and the rich and powerful. Night and day they brainwashed Hong Kong to believe that welfare can only result in disaster," said Lee Cheuk-yan, leader of the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions and a newly-elected legislator. "Now people can say what they really think." Their demands are so far modest — ending a scheme that brings cheap labour in from China, more care for the elderly and the jobless.

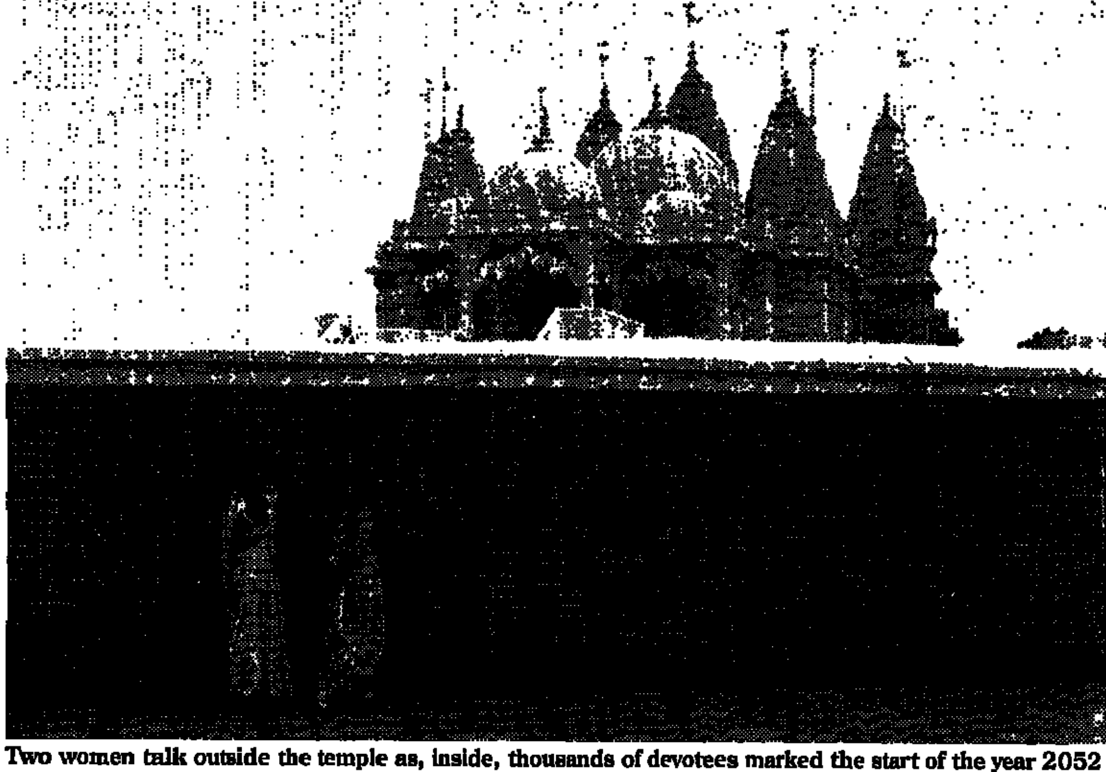
The tycoons are worried, though they draw comfort from China's promise to scrap the new legislature in 1997. Businessmen rail against what they call "free lunch welfarism". Together, they denounce any attempt to expand health cover, currently limited to emergencies, or expand unemployment benefits beyond a means-tested system unavailable to virtually everyone between 15 and 59. The government has approved a plan to make private pension schemes mandatory, but rejects any public-funded programme to assist the elderly. Not even the most populist politicians advocate raising income tax, now at 15 per cent.

But the mood has changed. "Hong Kong society used to enjoy great dynamism and openness. People felt that if you were trying your best you could succeed," said university lecturer Lui Tak-lok, co-author of the Oxfam study. "But when you've tried hard and you still can't get a job you despair."

FOREIGN EXCHANGES

	Sterling rates October 23	Sterling rates October 30
Australia	2.0938-2.0980	2.0717-2.0758
Austria	15.35-15.38	15.58-15.61
Belgium	44.89-44.09	45.52-45.63
Canada	2.1641-2.1672	2.1471-2.1501
Denmark	8.48-8.51	8.59-8.61
France	7.70-7.71	7.69-7.71
Germany	2.1824-2.1855	2.2149-2.2180
Hong Kong	12.17-12.18	12.20-12.21
Ireland	0.9748-0.9773	0.9731-0.9756
Italy	2,548-2,552	2,514-2,518
Japan	157.26-157.53	160.22-160.49
Netherlands	2.4438-2.4468	2.4818-2.4851
New Zealand	2.3850-2.3883	2.3870-2.3902
Norway	9.89-9.70	9.80-9.81
Portugal	231.19-231.82	233.54-234.19
Spain	189.95-190.25	192.26-192.56
Sweden	10.53-10.55	10.44-10.46
Switzerland	1.7732-1.7760	1.7880-1.7908
USA	1.5790-1.5800	1.5778-1.5788
ECU	1.1997-1.2014	1.2060-1.2078

FTSE100 Share index down 21.6 at 3508.9. FTSE 250 index down 30 at 3662.6. Gold down $0.50 at $382.25.



Two women talk outside the temple as, inside, thousands of devotees marked the start of the year 2052

New year comes to Neasden

Madeleine Bunting

THOUSANDS **of Hindu devotees descended on the north London temple of Shri Swaminarayan last week to celebrate the new year, the biggest festival of the Hindu calendar.**

A queue of visitors snaked through marquees and up the steps of Europe's first purpose-built mandir, or temple, to pay their respects to the deities on the first day of year 2052.

Food and fruit were laid before the elaborately-dressed statues in the mandir, offered in thanks for the past year and to ask for a happy and prosperous year to come.

In the hall next door, a display of more than 600 dishes of food decorated with fruit and flowers had been placed in front of portraits of the leaders of this Hindu sect, which has 20,000 followers in Britain.

Since the £15 million mandir in Neasden opened in August, it has been swamped by an average of 1,000 visitors a day coming to worship, or simply to gawp at the lavish architecture.

Already the capacity of the mandir is in danger of being outstripped by the volume of visitors that has far exceeded expectation, said Girish Patel, a spokesman for the Swaminarayn Hindu Mission.

An estimated 30,000 Hindus had come from as far away as Leicester and Manchester. For many it was their first visit.

The Ankut Utsav celebrations represent new year's day and harvest festival rolled into one and come after the festival of lights or Diwali, which was also celebrated the day before.

Letter from Beijing Hamish McIlwraith

Raise the Red Emperor

NORMALLY I believe everything that I read in the China Daily, but one day things just went a bit too far. I spied a one-paragraph report tucked away in the middle pages which said that the stories about Chairman Mao's mummified remains turning green were false. The apparent greenish tinge around his gills was attributed to the unusual angle of the lighting in the mausoleum; the Chairman's skin was in excellent condition and to suggest otherwise was a vile insult.

Perhaps I'm not the sort of person who would appreciate a pickled sheep as Art, but I had always had a ghoulish urge to visit Mao's body in Tiananmen Square. The thought of seeing the preserved cadaver of the Red Emperor who had hidden himself away from his subjects while he was alive, but which was on display to be gawked at and genuflected to by the Grateful Masses, was morbid but irresistible.

Mao's tomb, despite being a fine example of wedding cake architecture, is not in the least attractive. The main entrance is flanked by two massive statues of groups of square-jawed, broad-shouldered soldiers, workers and peasants. Possibly in order to counter charges of exploiting the memory and socialist principles of the Great Helmsman, there's no entrance fee.

The queues to view the body are organised by stewards with small crackly, battery-powered loudspeakers. Most of the punters seemed to be wide-eyed out-of-townies who had made the pilgrimage from the countryside.

The stewards bullied us into two long lines and let us in in groups of 20. A couple of boys sold souvenir programmes to the faithful. A sign cautioned us to remove our hats, keep silent and not take photographs.

We were directed along a corridor lined with large, white marble tiles engraved with some of Mao's dictums in a gold likeness of his calligraphy. From there we entered the outer chamber, which contains a brilliant white marble statue of Mao sitting on the type of cotton-stuffed armchair that Chinese political leaders favour at meetings with comrades.

We filed past, ushered through with firm hand signals by the bored stewards, and entered the central chamber where Mao's body is displayed. It lies on a central, metre-high black marble dais and is protected by a glass case shaped like a truncated rectangular prism.

An irritable official told a couple of people who were whispering to be quiet and instructed our line to pass to the left of the body while the other line was told to pass to the right. Large, transparent plastic screens prevented us from getting closer than a couple of metres and our escorts made sure no one lingered for more than a brief look.

I was surprised that the red flag that covers the body from the feet to the chest bears a huge yellow hammer and sickle, but I supposed it symbolised the nature of International Communism. Perhaps if Mao was draped in a Chinese flag, fundamentalists would accuse the Chinese leadership of isolationism and parochialism.

I don't know what any of the other visitors to the mausoleum thought. Many of them looked on in awed silence — but I thought the grey Mao-suited body looked bloated and very pink; no hint of green at all. I found it difficult to keep in mind that I was looking at someone who had shaped the history of a billion people: all I saw was the wax-like shell of an old man. It crossed my mind that it had been ordered from Madame Tussaud's, but if it had then surely someone had made a mistake in asking for the grotesque detail of the fleshy jowls, the thin reedy lips and the deeply-etched crow's feet. I glanced over to the man on the opposite side of the casket for a reaction, but his eyes were fixed intently on Mao's face. I hardly had time to start studying his features before a steward barked at me to move along.

And then we were out. Everyone eased up and started chatting excitedly about what they'd seen and began bargaining with the stall holders over the prices of their Mao cigarette lighters, Mao badges and Mao pictures to hang from the rear-view mirrors of their cars.

Notes & Queries Joseph Harker

I HAVE **heard that Siegfried Sassoon and Robert Graves fell out because of their first world war experiences. Is this true?**

THE friendship between Graves and Sassoon did not break down because of their war experiences. The relevant occasion was the publication in 1929 of Goodbye To All That. In the original text Graves had included, in breach of copyright, a hitherto unpublished poem that Sassoon had sent him privately years earlier, and which he did not want printed. Graves had also made certain references to Sassoon's mother which were thought unacceptable. These passages were deleted at the printers, but not before some copies of the book in its original form, numbering perhaps a hundred or so, had got through. — *Dr T Kramer, Finchley, London*

HAS **anyone from the winning side ever been found guilty of war crimes?**

GEORGE BUSH was condemned by the World Court for his invasion of Panama. — *Arjen Nÿeboer, Zwolle, The Netherlands*

IS MAN **the only animal which experiences baldness as a common sign of advancing age?**

IN COPULATION the male dunnock, or hedge sparrow, holds on by grasping in his bill the feathers on the crown of the female's head. Normally, the two sexes of this small brown bird are identical, but dunnocks mate so frequently and vigorously that in the spring the females become recognisably bald. — *John R Davies, Haverbreaks, Lancaster*

COULD **a young deciduous sapling grown in Europe adapt to the "opposite" seasons if it were transplanted in, say, Australia?**

I HAVE a number of herbaceous perennials (mostly irises) sent to me by friends in New Zealand. After an initial period of confusion, they do indeed adapt, most taking 18 months at most to adjust their growing and flowering seasons to the British ones. Plants which have been sent to New Zealand do the same thing. — *Jennifer Hewitt, British Iris Society, Kidderminster, Worcestershire*

ARE THE **varieties of snail commonly found in British gardens suitable for human consumption?**

ACCORDING to my SAS survival handbook, all British land snails are edible, as are the slugs. — *Richard Scruse, Bath, Avon*

WE ARE **told that the British gave the world the sports of cricket, soccer and rugby. Of these, only soccer has been widely taken up in those countries that were not part of the empire. Why?**

IN MY rugby-only schooldays, we were told by our headmaster that "Soccer is a gentleman's game played by ruffians, whilst Rugby is a ruffian's game played by gentlemen." Obviously the ruffian's version of cricket is baseball. — *John Russell, Bulgach, Switzerland*

Any answers?

WHY IS A **kangaroo court so called? —** *Gerald Chamberland, Ujung, Pandang, Indonesia*

THE TITLES **on the spines run from top to bottom for English books but from bottom to top for French and German books. Is this a publishing convention and, if so, when was it agreed upon? —** *Lesley Black, London*

WHY **do we "pull someone's leg"? Why not an arm? —** *Robert Fysh, Altrincham, Cheshire*

Answers should be e-mailed to weekly@guardian.co.uk, faxed to 0171/44171-242-0985, or posted to The Guardian Weekly, 75 Farringdon Road, London EC1M 3HQ.

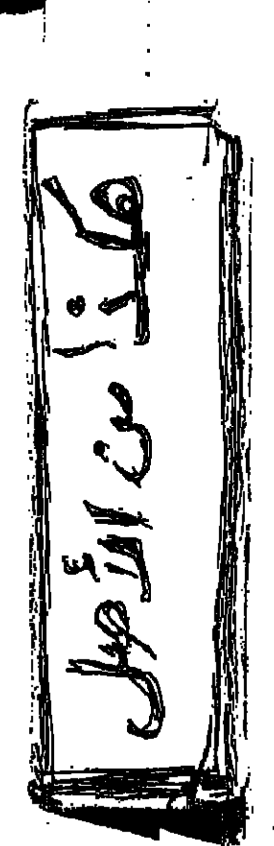
A Country Diary

Mark Cocker

THORPE HAMLET, Norfolk: The Cornish Gilliflower, the Hambledon Deux Ans, the Peasgood's Nonsuch, Roundway Magnum Bonum and the Hoary Morning: these wonderful names belong to the latest group of organisms being spotlighted as proof of Britain's shrinking biodiversity. However, in this instance their disappearance is not the result of persecution or over-exploitation. The problem is we don't eat enough of them.

They're apples and October 21 was Apple Day. An annual event since 1990, it was instituted to celebrate the quality and range of British apples (there are 6,000 on a national register) and to highlight the threat of *les pommes francaises*. Last year Britain imported 420,000 tonnes of apples and pears, while home-grown fruit accounted for only 30 per cent of the total. Since 1970 more than 30,000 hectares, half our traditional orchards, have been grubbed up. At current rates of loss there will be none left by 2020. The problem is exacerbated by EU subsidies that were designed to prevent over-production by encouraging growers to reduce their acreage — a scheme taken up by a disproportionately large number in England.

With the orchards go many environmental riches and rural practices. The ground beneath the trees, for example, can hold a wide variety of flowers and supports more wildlife than either arable crops or grassland. The old trees also serve as hosts for lichens and mistletoe, while their gnarled trunks provide valuable micro-habitats for insects and spiders. These in turn attract arboreal birds like woodpeckers and treecreepers. The wryneck, now virtually extinct in this country, had a traditional association with the orchards of southern England. Ultimately, however, the principal loss is in the wonderful history, variety and flavour of British apples themselves.



Korea's Ex-President Apologizes

Kevin Sullivan in Tokyo

FORMER South Korean President Roh Tae Woo apologized live on national television last week for secretly creating and maintaining a political slush fund of more than $600 million during his presidency, which ended in 1993.

Roh said he had raised at least $667 million from corporations during his five-year term and used most of the money to finance ruling Democratic Liberal Party activities or to give undisclosed sums to "people who work for the country." The former president, who faces possible criminal charges in connection with the slush fund, did not identify any recipients by name but did say about $227 million remains in bank accounts that were opened under false names.

"I candidly offer my heartfelt apology to the people," Roh said. "I am totally responsible for all this and prepared to receive any judgment or punishment."

Current President Kim Young Sam and Kim Dae Jung, a prominent opposition party leader and possible presidential candidate in 1997, also found themselves enmeshed in a political scandal that has shocked and embarrassed South Korea.

Kim Dae Jung said that Roh gave him the equivalent of $2.6 million from the fund during the 1992 campaign, in which he unsuccessfully opposed Kim Young Sam, a member of the same party as Roh. But Kim Dae Jung contended that during the campaign Kim Young Sam had received much more from Roh's fund.

A Roh contribution to Kim Dae Jung would seem curious because Roh and his successor have been political allies since 1990.

Kim Young Sam, who is visiting Honolulu on the final leg of a U.S. trip, said he would continue to press for a full investigation into the matter, but made no comment on allegations that he had received money from the slush fund. "I issued orders twice to make sure that the investigation is thorough and there should be no sanctuary," the president said. "The government's handling of the case will prove its morality."

The vast sums of money involved in the scandal have infuriated South Koreans, who have suffered through decades of political corruption and abuse of power. Although South Korea thrives as a prosperous economic power, its politics have only recently become free and democratic.

From 1961 until Roh was elected in 1988, Korea was governed by an oppressive military regime that brutally suppressed opposition politicians. Kim Young Sam spent time under house arrest in the 1980s for speaking out against former president Chun Doo Hwan.

Since his election, Kim has promised to work for political and financial reforms as part of his efforts to "globalize" South Korea. He has pledged to bring its domestic political affairs up to the standard of its world-class reputation in economic production.

Rumors of a Roh slush fund had circulated around Seoul for several years. In May 1993, Roh's daughter, Roh So Young, and her husband were convicted in a U.S. court of violating currency laws. Prosecutors said the couple brought nearly $200,000 in cash into the United States and deposited the money in 11 California banks in 1990, when Roh was still president. Both were given one-year suspended sentences. Prosecutors said that the wrappers around the cash showed the bills came from a Swiss bank account, raising Korean suspicions about whether Roh had raised and hidden money during his presidency.

On October 19, an opposition member of the parliament charged that Roh had hidden millions of dollars in the Shinhan Bank in Seoul. The next day, the prime minister ordered an investigation.

Even before Roh's apology, investigators had already found accounts containing about $133 million — $97 million in the Shinhan Bank and $36 million in the Dong-A Investment & Finance Co., also in Seoul. Investigators have reviewed the records of at least 20 banks and financial companies searching for clues about the slush fund.

Roh said in an eight-minute prepared speech that the money was raised from corporations.

Crying shame . . . South Korea's former president Roh Tae-woo tearfully apologises during a press conference in Seoul PHOTO: YONHAP

Men Who Seek To Retain Their Role as Masters

OPINION
Ellen Goodman

HERE are two vignettes from the new men's movement — if "new" is the right word for it.

A young convert back from a gathering of his brethren vows to be caring, and responsible to his family and community. He promises to be the upright head of his household.

A woman who stayed on the sidelines is asked by a television reporter what her role is in the future of this movement. She pledges, unself-consciously, to stand behind her men.

Both these scenes came in the aftermath of the Million Man March. But they could just as easily have been culled from the annals of the Promise Keepers crusade.

Last month, Louis Farrakhan brought together hundreds of thousands of black men on the Washington Mall. Last summer, Bill McCartney brought together that many men, mostly white, in a series of stadium revivals and plans his own million man event in 1997.

There are two wings to the mass men's movement now in America. One called by the Fruit of Islam, the other led by conservative Christians, both sounding similar themes. Atonement. Family. Healing. Responsibility. Fatherhood.

Can you tell the rhetoric without the score card? Which speaker at which gathering said, "This is a generation of desperately wounded, broken men who must heal themselves, their families, their communities?"

On the Nation of Islam web site, Louis Farrakahn writes, "Allah says in the Koran that men are a degree above women . . . Anytime you have a woman that does not look up to you, brother, you're in trouble."

In the handbook of the Promise Keepers, author Tony Evans writes, "I'm not suggesting that you take your role back. I'm urging you to take it back. . . . Treat the lady gently and lovingly. But lead . . ."

In advance of the Million Man March, women helped organize buses and schedules. In the minutes before the Promise Keepers revival, women made the rounds of stadium seats, praying and anointing them with oil. At neither rally were they welcome.

This is not your father's men's movement. This is not the feminist men's movement. These are not wild men seeking mythological roots in wooded weekend retreats.

The men who assembled under these banners and T-shirts have been called from the disappointments of their lives. They've been called back by Farrakhan "to accept the responsibility of being heads of our households", which include women who are told by Evans to "let your man be a man."

I am reminded of the postwar years when men came home from fighting and Rosie put down her riveting tools. In those days, women were exhausted from carrying the double burden and grateful for the dangers that men had faced. They were sent back to their domestic place and many went without a fight, perhaps even with a sigh of relief.

Is it like that now? Are women in this generation, single mothers especially, tired enough of carrying the load to trade off their weary independence and take on their designated role as "promise reapers?"

Are black women in particular so anxious to get their men back from the deadly war zone of the streets, so tired of being the primary everything — wage earner, parent — that they will step back behind their man to save his hide and soul. And is this the only deal that a mainstream of men will cut? Head of family or no family? Is this new deal blackmail?

For a long time, women wished that men would share truth and sorrow with other men the way women have with each other. They wished that men would become more attentive fathers, tender husbands. They wished men would deal with their anger. Many have. But be careful what you wish for. The mass men's movement in this country now carries all these texts to men. Under the tutelage of anti-abortion, anti-gay leaders, it also carries a subtext: female submissiveness.

Today, Americans talk about families and communities in chaos. The absence of fathers is described as a national disease. The return of fathers as a cure. But in any chaos it's easy to give up on the democracy of relationships, the give and take of equality. It's easy to long for control, for authority figures, for old icons of manhood.

I know that every Promise Keeper is not coming home to re-enact a traditional male role. Nor was every black man on the mall touched by the cry of male supremacy. But after all this time, all this change, the new man being molded by this movement doesn't sound much like a partner. He's just a kinder, gentler patriarch.

Conservatives Divided Over Powell Bid

David S. Broder and Dan Balz

THE WARNING shots some conservatives have fired at Colin L. Powell raise serious concerns about his ability to win the 1996 Republican presidential nomination, in the view of party leaders, but are not enough to doom his chances if he becomes a candidate.

"I think if he decides to run, you'll never hear the phrase 'Rockefeller Republican' from him again," former vice president Dan Quayle said last month, only half-jokingly. "And I think he'll find a way to endorse the 'Contract With America,' which has near-unanimous support from Republicans."

The author of the contract, House Speaker Newt Gingrich, R-Ga., said recently that the retired general appeared to be moving in the right direction and predicted that if Powell "runs as somebody who is explaining and defending where we're going, I think he has a good chance to win the nomination." But, he told constituents at a town hall meeting in Roswell, Georgia, "if he runs as somebody who's opposed to where we're going, I think frankly he wouldn't have a prayer."

Powell's identification of himself as a "Rockefeller Republican" and his comment during his recent book tour that he found parts of the GOP Contract "too harsh" set off a wave of criticism from conservative activists, who also expressed dismay at his support of abortion rights, affirmative action and some gun control measures. Some said that Powell winning the nomination would reverse all their work in moving the Republican Party to the right.

Others of equal standing in the conservative movement, however, defended Powell. The debate among conservative spokesmen and commentators flared last month on the pages of conservative publications, on talk show interviews and in angry exchanges of letters between the combatants.

"As we're seeing already," said Eddie Mahe, a veteran consultant for conservative candidates, "his candidacy would be divisive and cause a lot of controversy. There are conservative activists who would believe his positions on a lot of issues are unacceptable. Mr. and Mrs. America would look more to his leadership ability and not hold him to the same standard. But I think he would have a very difficult time in the Republican nominating process."

As Powell moves toward a decision, the debate among conservatives has intensified. On one side are Republicans like William J. Bennett, Jack Kemp and William Kristol, who have — in varying degrees — been open to a Powell candidacy. They have argued that a Powell who runs in general support of the GOP agenda could significantly enlarge the party's appeal beyond its current base.

But conservatives like presidential candidate Patrick J. Buchanan and Gary Bauer of the Family Research Council have argued that Powell's positions disqualify him from leading the Republican revolution in 1996 and beyond and that the party would be making a critical mistake to abandon principle for the sake of a popular personality.

GUARDIAN WEEKLY
November 5 1995

Election Fever Grips Manila

Presidential candidates are jousting more than two years before the poll, writes **Keith B. Richburg**

SMALL WONDER Americans looking at Philippine politics call it a country in their own image. There's a roaring debate over term limits. An ageing movie actor who wants to be president. An ambitious Senate leader (recently removed) taking potshots at the administration. There is even a provincial governor with national ambitions offering himself as Mr. Outsider.

All this is heating up while the next presidential election is still more than two and a half years away.

Most of the current speculation centers on the incumbent, President Fidel V. Ramos, the cigar-chomping former general who was elected president in 1992. The constitutional limits Mr. Ramos to a single six-year term, and he insists that he has no intention of staying beyond 1998. His long-term ambition, he has repeated, is to manage a golf course.

But no one seems to believe him.

"His word cannot be taken at face value," said a frequent critic, Senator Miriam Defensor Santiago, who narrowly lost the presidency to Mr. Ramos last time and who vows to run again. She recalled how the late strongman Ferdinand Marcos made similar disavowals shortly before declaring martial law, rewriting the constitution and staying beyond his term.

"I think he's keeping his options open," said the Reverend John J. Carroll, a Jesuit priest who heads the Institute on Church and Social Issues at the Ateneo University here. "These trial balloons keep going up. If he really wanted to put a lid on these discussions, he could put the lid on.

The "trial balloons" refer mainly to various — some say nefarious — moves afoot to amend the country's eight-year-old constitution and remove term limits, which also confine senators to two six-year terms and members of Congress and local officials to three-year terms. Without a change, many incumbent senators and members of Congress will be barred from re-election in 1998, which explains the moves to call a constitutional convention and a related effort to petition for a referendum.

"For politicians to be prohibited from running again is worse than death," said Senator Blas Ople, an opponent of any changes.

Several columnists and many politicians say the desire for lifting term limits was behind the recent ouster of Edgardo Angara as Senate president: Mr. Angara is seen as a leading contender for the presidency in 1998. He says Mr. Ramos secretly orchestrated his ouster from the Senate leadership to have a clear path to change the charter.

If so, the ploy appears to have backfired. After Mr. Angara's removal by a majority vote of the Senate, Mr. Ramos defensively said he was not involved, and he was forced to repeat that he really means to step down in 1998.

Mr. Angara, meanwhile, is at the peak of his popularity. He has now formed what is called the conscience Bloc in the Senate, and he has shifted from being Mr. Ramos's key legislative supporter to a critic who misses no chance to swipe at the administration.

Some are rallying against the elimination of term limits. Former President Corazon C. Aquino has helped begin a movement to save the constitution, and the powerful archbishop of Manila, Cardinal Jaime Sin, is helping.

In 1992, Mrs Aquino followed the spirit of the term-limit law. She voluntarily stepped down at the end of her term even though, as the incumbent when the constitution was adopted, she could have run again.

If Mr. Ramos really sticks to his intentions, and the single-term limit remains in place, then the question turns to who will replace him in 1998. Business leaders and the foreign investment community are eager to see if the economic momentum building under Mr. Ramos can be sustained.

Also, observers overseas are hopeful that the Philippines is finally past the stage of coup attempts and insurgencies. In a country where personality often means power, Mr. Ramos is seen as a force for stability. Mrs. Aquino was widely seen as weak, and that perception drove her enemies to launch destabilising coup attempts.

One possible candidate with a "strong guy" image and the ambition to want to succeed Mr. Ramos as president is Richard Gordon, the former mayor of Olongapo City who is now chairman of the Subic Bay authority. His success in making the former U.S. naval base viable as an investment center and free port is seen as an example of strong-minded leadership, and he is known to want to take his Subic experiment to the national level.

GUARDIAN WEEKLY
November 5 1995

Russia Sidelines Its Writers

David Hoffman in Moscow

BORN in the twilight of the Soviet era, Alexander Terekhov aspired to be a writer and dreamed of being published in the thick literary journals, such as Novy Mir and Znamya, whose densely typeset pages have carried novels and poetry that stirred the conscience of Russians for generations.

Instead, he is sitting at a barren desk in the offices of a tawdry tabloid newspaper, Top Secret, where he writes brash, colloquial satire. A young and established author, Terekhov works at yellow journalism to make a living and laments that he can hardly understand what has happened to literature in post-Soviet Russia. The vivid new world of markets and capitalism, of free speech and democracy, has left him feeling vaguely disoriented, moody and, worst of all, unwanted by readers.

"I am like an arrow that was let go, and then the target was taken away," he said. "We were flung in this direction. And it turned out, we weren't needed by anyone." He added, gloomily, "I think there are no readers."

Terekhov is only 29 years old, but his complaint speaks for Russian writers, both young and old, who find themselves groping for a new direction in a country transformed.

For more than a century, Russian writers occupied a special place in society. Literature was at the forefront of opposition to power, and in the Soviet era totalitarian rulers went to great lengths to bend writers to their will.

But four years after the demise of the old order, a fresh sense of purpose has yet to emerge. The traditional connection between writers and society seems to have mysteriously slackened, just as all aspects of Russian life have been thrown into a crisis of identity after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

During the Soviet era, writers had to cope with the deadening effect of censorship and the Communist Party's doctrine, socialist realism, which attempted to force writers to celebrate socialism and the party line. Mediocre writers who hewed to this method were rewarded with massive print runs of their books and stories, better apartments, travel privileges and subsidies. Those who did not were simply not published. The end of Communist rule has brought Russian writers their greatest moment of freedom in more than seven decades, but they nonetheless lack a sense of direction.

"If today's writer hasn't completely lost the traditional role, he has lost it largely," said Tatyana Bek, a poet, critic and editor at the journal Voprosy Literatury. "If we ask why, for a century and a half, we had the most politicized poetry in the world, the reason is because in the newspapers there was not a word of truth. And history as a science was falsified. Poetry took up the functions of newspapers and historical science."

Freed from the shackles of state control and ideology, Russians can now enjoy racy television soap operas, pulp detective thrillers and sensation-filled tabloid newspapers — just a few of the entertainments that compete with literature for attention.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the near collapse of the literary "thick journals" that have historically played a central role in Russian literature. In a few short years they have slid from towering peaks — selling millions of copies every month — to circulation in the thousands. Their financial situation today is so precarious that if it were not for help from American financier George Soros, most would have closed.

Since the early 19th century, these monthly periodicals, crammed with prose, poetry, literary criticism and commentary, have been an indispensable part of Russia's cultural life. Printed on newsprint, in small type, the thick journals could accommodate an entire novel and have room to spare. They were the essential showcase for the career of any new writer, the arbiter of what was worth reading.

When perestroika reforms began to open a hidden treasure of once forbidden works, the thick journals exploded. Years of pent-up demand pushed circulation into the millions. For the first time, Russians could read such important works as Dr. Zhivago, The First Circle and Children Of The Arbat. It was a heady experience for writers and editors. But the perestroika boom ended with the Soviet Union, and the circulation of the thick journals plummeted. Novy Mir, which sold more than 2.6 million copies at the height of the perestroika years, now has a circulation of 31,600.

Part of the sudden shift in fortunes was strictly economic. State subsidies were cut; the price of paper skyrocketed.

"There is great literary prose, and there is junk," said Terekhov. "It's only junk that you can earn money from . . . No one can earn a living off literature . . . So, you write a book where a man's head is cut off on the second page and the woman takes her underwear off on Page 5."



Portrait of America

Robert Coles

EDWARD HOPPER
An Intimate Biography
By Gail Levin
Knopf. 678pp. $35

WHEN a full cultural history of 20th-century America is written — no doubt at the start of the third millennium — Edward Hopper will surely command a great deal of attention. Arguably, he will rank as our country's leading artist of that century — one whose canvases became part of a public consciousness.

Not that Hopper had an easy time of it from the start. He had to endure years of outright rejection, insistent disfavor. But he had stamina, stubbornness going for him — a refusal to be deterred by the judgment of those who had power.

Hopper endured dismissal and condescension from any number of art critics and museum curators, who were far more taken with, say, abstract expressionist artists than with his kind of American realism. He triumphed through the appeal his work had for a growing army of viewers, rather than through the favor of the intellectual custodians of his profession.


Self-portrait (1925-30)

For many years Gail Levin has devoted her considerable and thoughtful energy to the study of Hopper's work and life. She has written essays on his life and presented his work to us in volume after volume — his career as an illustrator, an engraver, an artist whose paintings gradually engaged with the moral and social imagination of so many of us. Now she is his most ambitious biographer — with the important help of his artist wife, Josephine Nivison Hopper, "Jo" to Hopper (who depicted her in some of his drawings and paintings). Indeed, it is hard to imagine this long, thorough, revealing and quite provocative book without the constant voice of Jo, whose daily diary entries inform page after page — a running chronicle of a great artist's life, but also, of an exceedingly tempestuous marriage, which lasted and worked, no matter its strenuous strains.

Hopper was born in Nyack, N.Y., to a family of modest circumstances. The name is of Dutch origin. All his life he looked up to Rembrandt; both were wizards with "light," able to use it as an instrument of compelling character analysis. Hopper never attended college — he was yet another American autodidact. He read broadly, deeply; studied with artists in New York; went to Europe as a young man, but thereafter shunned those trans-Atlantic trips so appealing to artists (and others of relative privilege).

For a while — for decades, actually — he was a salesman of sorts; he went from magazine to magazine, with his portfolio, in search of assignments as an illustrator. He did so, of course, to make a living — but he never gave up the desire to paint, to be an artist at the beck and call of his own spirit, rather than that of commerce. Even as he did pictures aimed at selling products or helping readers become visually involved with the stories they were reading, he repaired in his heart to his studio, where he struggled with forms and shapes, with pigments, with light and shadows, and not least, with ideas, which he chose to tether to a representational reality.


Gas (1940) . . . Edward Hopper is 'a master at rendering the inarticulate'

Even now, time spent with his pictures can bring fresh meaning to tired words such as "alienation," "loneliness"; even now, his talent as a painter rescues his work, and us, the beholders of it, from a generation of socially and psychologically labored interpretation.

His powerfully suggestive inwardness, his reflective breadth and depth, his disciplined craftsmanship, his restless, sharply knowing interest in a nation, its people, their ways with one another — all of that still offers him a certain immunity from the killing possibilities of cultural attention, whereby someone is "summed up," and soon enough abandoned for the next objects of fashionable interest. Hopper lingers, survives even critical acclaim. Himself taciturn, a master at rendering the inarticulate, the yearnings and worries we have learned to hide from ourselves, never mind others, he brings us mood and revelation with a pointed intensity.

This lucid, almost hovering biography (season after season set down for us) is worthy of its subject, his approach to art. Wisely, generously, this biographer lets Jo herself present her day-to-day struggles with her mighty, inscrutable, tenaciously determined husband — a continuing, detailed narrative by a protagonist, and at times, an antagonist. For over four decades these two artists lived together, loved and inspired one another, and not least, locked horns. Theirs was the mystery of an attachment that lasted, no matter its serious flaws. All the while, Jo observed him, the artist observer, and described what she saw feverishly, painstakingly, in a torrent of declarations, exclamations, abbreviations, asides. Hers is a diarist's chronicle that proceeds at a fast clip, now summoned by a biographer able to provide us a context for all those dark nights of a steadfast marriage's soul: Jo as Edward's ally, his model, his nagging scold, as watchful of him as he was of everyone else.

Gail Levin has given us, with obvious erudition and admiration, Hopper the "creative artist" and Hopper the reclusive, cranky, brilliantly thoughtful, impossibly egoistic, highly industrious man, no less limited in mind and heart than the rest of us. A constant wanderer across our American scene, he took our close measure, documented the headlong, sprawling, anxious nature of our early and middle years of this American century; bequeathed us, in his pictures, a landscape of our edgy, worried assertive selves.

Secrets From the Green-Room

Meryle Secrest

A HELL OF A LIFE
An Autobiography
By Maureen Stapleton and Jane Scovell
Simon & Schuster. 285pp. $24

IN THE ARENA
An Autobiography
By Charlton Heston
Simon & Schuster. 592pp. $27.50

TAKE IT LIKE A MAN
By Boy George with Spencer Bright
HarperCollins. 500pp. $25

MAUREEN STAPLETON tells the story of how, as a young actress working in the theater, she had one affair after another, not because she particularly wanted to, but because she felt sorry for her suitors. She remembers an old actor who chased her around a room until she came to a halt — she was afraid he was going to have a heart attack. Her friend Annie was horrified at her sexual largesse. "Don't give it away, darling," she advised. "Get paid for it." Stapleton concludes, "Oh God, if only I'd listened to her, surely I'd be living off the fat of the land instead of writing my memoirs."

One has grown used to the usual leaden autobiographies of actors and film stars, numbing catalogues of triumphs, polite references to other living personalities and barely disguised boastings about the authors' professional and moral superiority. The autobiography of Maureen Stapleton joins a select band of reminiscences by people who display such polished ease for the genre that it looks completely unrehearsed: the ultimate accomplishment. Like David Niven, the author of two classic memoirs, Stapleton has a horror of boring people, on stage or off. So she remembers without reservations. She is frank, she is devastating, she has a way of sketching character with a few telling sentences, she is honest about her strengths and weaknesses, and she has a vivid sense of humor.

As one has learned to expect from the early lives of actors, hers was full of hardships: a childhood spent racketing from one room to another while her parents, a strong-willed and obdurate Irish mother and alcoholic father, screamed and beat each other. After her father left home, he would take his daughter out occasionally — she was then 11 or 12 — and molest her physically. No wonder she developed a lifelong fear of close relationships and took the emotionally starved child's retreat into the benign world of make-believe.

She instantly knew she wanted to act although, as she writes, nobody wants to act who can help it. Acting is unlike any other field in that one triumph does not lead to another. You can be in a starring role one week and doing crossword puzzles the next. And you always have to prove yourself, over and over again. "Looking back, however, I don't feel I had a choice. For a fat, struggling kid like me, the only way out was to be someone else — an actor."

She went to New York, took a variety of jobs, studied acting at the New School for Social Research and waited for her chance. That came when she persuaded Guthrie McClintic to give her a walk-on part in The Playboy Of The Western World. Stapleton joined the Actors Studio and met numbers of young hopefuls, including Marlon Brando, who used to keep his drums in her closet.

She married her company manager, had a baby boy and soon landed a role for which she would become famous, that of Serafina delle Rose in Tennessee Williams's The Rose Tattoo, playing, at age 25, the part of a middle-aged woman with an adolescent daughter.

The physical and emotional demands of being an actor eventually caused her to begin drinking heavily. She had another child, got divorced, married again and got drunker and drunker. After years of self-abuse, she checked herself into a psychiatric facility and came out sober and 100 pounds lighter — "a human being again."

The tone of A Hell Of A Life is conversational, that of a cosy friend letting her hair down over a card game and a pack of cigarettes. Charlton Heston's tone in In The Arena, on the other hand, is that of someone who, having reached the screen actor's Mount Rushmore, considers himself the authority and is lecturing to the back row — quite literally, since he stops to "joke" that there will be a test about this or that later. One can hardly call his memoir as much fun, or as revelatory as Stapleton's, although his will doubtless get more attention.

Heston is professorial, solemn, testy. His early life may have been just as traumatic as Stapleton's, but it is impossible to tell from this carefully crafted account, with its frequent references to Heston's illustrious Scottish descent.

Heston is at his most interesting when he discusses his craft and the undeniable fact that the most handsome people are not necessarily the most photogenic, and vice versa. Having met the actor only once, I recollect that, although tall, he had a small head and rather fine features that looked out of proportion to his frame. That is just the kind of face, it would appear, that assumes colossal dimensions on a screen. Inevitably, Heston went on to play "famous men" roles, from John the Baptist to El Cid and Michelangelo. There was also a numbing succession of lesser roles to which his narrative gives equal weight (he has diaries of almost everything he has done, said or thought). It is not the kind of book to consult when one is looking for the deeper meaning of life. A typical comment is that most American men "feel a sort-of blood-call to that search for the real West." David Niven, where are you when we need you?

Then there is Boy George, that waiflike figure who, fortunately or otherwise, has an androgynous ability to look extremely convincing as a latter-day Twiggy, older and more sophisticated, but with the same look of knowing vulnerability. Take It Like a Man is at its best when describing George O'Dowd's upbringing in southeast London, son of an 18-year-old barmaid and a roughneck. He was abused and neglected and, as with most slum kids, his heroes were the pop stars. His lovers were other boys. There is something inexorable about his progression from fragile outsider to pop star in 1982. (He achieved fame with the album, Do You Really Want To Hurt Me?) Then there was the inevitable spiral into heroin addiction. I hope for the best for him but can't help worrying.

France pays dearly for its high profile

Mouna Naïm on why the French are targets of Algerian terrorism

THE WAVE of terrorism that has swept France in the past three months is not really comparable with the spate of attacks that killed and maimed the French in the eighties. Yet there is one essential similarity: in each case, the French government has paid a high price for its foreign policy — or perceived foreign policy — *vis-à-vis* countries or regions over which it once held sway.

However confused the demands of the Algerian Islamic fundamentalists may be — they have not only called on President Jacques Chirac to stop "supporting" the regime of the Algerian President Liamine Zeroual, but suggested that he might convert to Islam — they have succeeded, like the Middle Eastern terrorists a decade earlier, in forcing France to pay a high penalty for its political decisions.

The difference this time, though, is that, whereas in the eighties the French government was prepared to face the consequences of its decisions, it has tended to confuse the issue in the Algerian conflict.

The Middle East was a notorious troublespot during the eighties. France supported Iraq in its war against Iran, even to the point of lending it Super Etendard fighter planes. And it opened its doors to opponents of the Iranian regime, with which it was also involved in a major financial dispute.

France demanded that Lebanon's independence be respected, using language that alienated Syria and its allies in Lebanon. The French army participated in the multinational force that was sent to Beirut to restore peace after the pull-out of the Palestine Liberation Organisation in 1982 and to protect the civilian population after the massacres at the Palestinian refugee camps of Sabra and Chatila. It supervised the evacuation from Tripoli, in northern Lebanon, of Yasser Arafat and PLO fighters who had been encircled by Syrian forces.

In other words, France made no bones about its policies and stood by them, in a region of great complexity where any action has multiple repercussions.

In contrast with its 11 partners in the EC — which, except for Britain, have a "clean record" in the region — France never abandoned its bid to exercise a political and cultural influence there. It continued to play a power game that it thought would enable it to improve its commercial position in the region.

Britain, by contrast, decided to scale down its political presence and concentrate instead on trade with the newly fledged states. Admittedly, it did plant a few "advisers" here and there in the ministries and armies of certain Gulf states. But their presence is as discreet as it is effective in the day-to-day conduct of affairs.

France's refusal to keep a low profile explains why it has been much more of a target for terrorist attacks than any other European country. The only nation that found itself in a comparable situation was the United States. But despite its determination to call the tune in a part of the world where many regarded it as the true "Great Satan" only American interests abroad were subjected to attacks.

There were two reasons for this: France was a closer target, more easily entered, and somewhat over-liberal in its policy of issuing visas; and the US, while feared, exercised a certain fascination on those who denounced it so venomously, for in the back of their minds they also secretly hoped to get into the US's good books.

The US has not today become the target of Algerian Islamic extremists partly because it does not have historical ties with Algeria, and partly also because it has built bridges with some of the extremists.

That leaves France to face the terrorist threat on its own. In the eighties, it accepted responsibility for its policies and could identify the enemy. Today the situation is more confused.

First, the Algerian extremists form a loosely knit organisation, and it is far from certain that they all share the same aims and ideals or obey a single leader. One moment they level specific accusations at France, the next they trot out confused ideological and religious slogans.

Second, the French government's claim to have adopted a "neutral" stance on Algeria is difficult even for the non-Islamist opposition in Algeria to swallow.

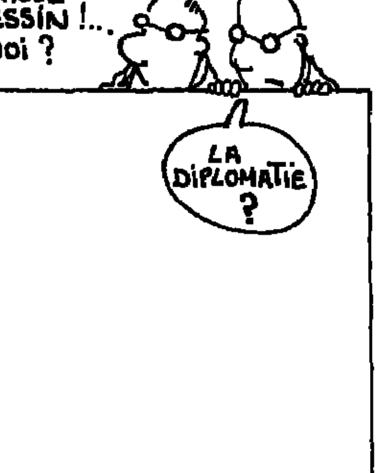
There is no guarantee, however, that if France were clearly to plump for one side or the other it would not be subjected to terrorism from another quarter.

Although they regularly denounce France, both parties in the Algerian conflict are seeking to win France over to their own cause. French policy has less influence on the Algerian problem than the problem has on French policy.

Would France be right to pull in its diplomatic horns and concentrate solely on trade balances and export volumes?

That would require a change in what Charles de Gaulle called "a certain idea of France" — something which no French government since De Gaulle, whether of the right or left, has taken on board.

(October 21)



'There's something missing in this cartoon . . . but what?' 'Diplomacy?'

Chirac caught nodding

THE Algerian President Liamine Zeroual's last-minute cancellation on October 22 of the meeting he was supposed to have in New York with Jacques Chirac came as a slap in the face for France, which shells out some 5 billion francs (£650 million) of aid to Algeria each year, *writes Alain Frachon*.

Chirac fell into a trap largely of his own making. There should have been no announcement of the meeting until the two presidents were in New York. That would have prevented the Islamists from denouncing the "collusion" between Paris and Algiers, and the Algerian military regime from seeming to secure France's endorsement only hours before the official opening of the Algerian presidential campaign.

The resulting mess was no doubt due to a lack of preparation, a poor evaluation of the consequences and an underestimation of the Algerian regime's ulterior motives. There is something familiar about the whole episode: wasn't the Elysée taken by surprise by the degree of ill-feeling provoked by its decision to resume nuclear testing?

(October 24)

Angola's peace grows more tense by the day

Frédéric Fritscher in Luanda

AN ANGOLAN army helicopter flew over the capital, crossed the bay, skimming low over its oil-slicked waters, then hovered high above a spit of land called Ilha. Hundreds of raggedly-dressed youngsters craned their necks and shaded their eyes against the relentless sun as they watched 10 parachutists leap out in a burst of colour.

There are few amusements in Angola, and this one was free. "They do their jump every Sunday," said a skinny adolescent, João Antonio. "I come and see them before going to the beach."

Ilha's only road is crammed with cars and people. The restaurants that mushroomed there during the "mini-peace" (the period between the Lisbon accords of May 1991 and the resumption of the civil war at the end of 1992) still operate. But they are open only at weekends and for lunch during the week — the area is too dangerous at night.

Their terraces are packed almost exclusively with UN troops in civvies, diplomats and expats employed by the 55 NGOs that have set up in Luanda — few Angolans can afford a meal at $30. As they sip their beer or imported wine, they watch scantily-clad local beauties on the beach and two planes flying overhead with streamers advertising a brand of refrigerator and a swimming pool in the upper-crust district of Alvalado.

It is as if nothing had happened — as if Angola's war-torn and poverty-stricken capital had simply erased 20 long years of civil war from its collective memory.

But traces of that conflict are still there. Roads are full of potholes. Buildings that were abandoned before completion by the Portuguese when independence came in 1975 still sport their skeletons of concrete and steel.

Work on the building known as "the Rocket", a mausoleum where apparatchiks of the MPLA, the country's former single party, hoped to transfer the ashes of one of its historic leaders, Agostinho di Neto, was halted long ago. ...

All that remains of the Turismo Hotel, which was taken by storm in October 1992 by government forces wishing to dislodge the leaders of Jonas Savimbi's rebel Unita movement, is no more than a shell.

There are swarms of children in search of anything that will enable them to survive. The streets are lined with beggars, many of them war-wounded and amputees. At the end of September an armed group of them stormed an army supply depot. About 30 people were injured in clashes with the police. The government removed them by force to the outskirts of the city, where they scrape a living on former building sites. Some 60 vehicles belonging to the UN peacekeeping mission have been stolen in the past few months by armed soldiers on half pay.

The quiet of the capital at night is regularly shattered by bursts of automatic fire. To maintain a semblance of security, the authorities bring out their élite police force as soon as dusk falls. But they are not paid any more regularly than other government employees and have taken to extorting money from pedestrians and motorists alike.

The cost of living has been rising inexorably. A litre of cooking oil costs 6,000 new kwanza (the equivalent of a manual worker's monthly salary), and a chicken six times more. The government's biggest security headache is mounting unrest among the population at large, which could eventually lead to an uprising. It had to promise a great deal to get the trade unions to call off their planned general strike of September 21. But it did not keep its promises. The shelves of the price-controlled stores are empty.

What keeps Luanda's inhabitants alive is the presence of canny traders from French-speaking African countries, who import basic consumer goods and fix the market prices.

Luanda-based western and African diplomats all say the same thing: the longer the peace lasts, paradoxically, the more discontent and insecurity it breeds. They were the first to welcome the success of the meeting of donors that was held in Brussels at the end of September.

The Angolans wanted about $650 million for an initial phase of national reconstruction. Reassured by the double act put on by President José Eduardo dos Santos and Savimbi (who were meeting for the third time in five months), donors promised almost $1 billion.

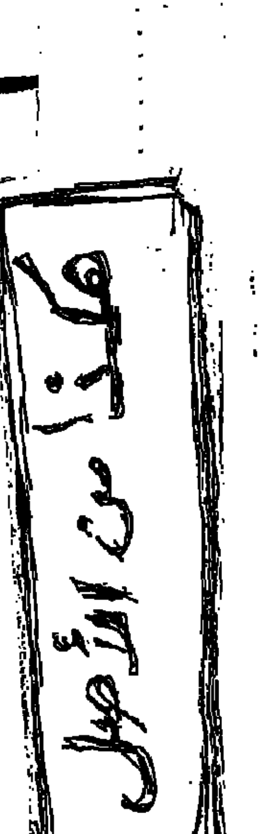
"We'll never see the colour of their money, and nothing will change," says a former MPLA activist who is now a history lecturer. "We'll go on starving while MPs continue driving around in their recently imported Citroën XMs. We don't even know if the war is going to start up again or if the peace can hold. The Angolan population is in a state of doubt. Nothing will be possible unless the two armies are merged into a single force and surplus soldiers demobilised."

But the phased billeting of government and Unita troops to 15 UN-built quartering areas (now in the process of completion) has not yet begun. Under the programme, which is part of the Lusaka peace accords, 200,000 men will be merged into a single Angolan army; 110,000 of them will later be demobilised after, in theory, being given vocational training. Both the MPLA and Unita, whose chiefs of staff meet regularly in Luanda, say the UN is responsible for the delay. ...

Despite the demobilisation programme and their declarations of good intent, both factions are continuing to bolster their armies with new weapons and forcibly recruited fresh troops — a sign, surely, that they are themselves deeply uncertain about what the future holds.

(October 20)





Aristide picks close aide as new Haiti PM

Michel Carolt in Port-au-Prince

ON OCTOBER 23 the Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide chose one of his closest collaborators, Claudette Werleigh, as prime minister to succeed Smarck Michel, who resigned last week. The appointment of Werleigh, who has been foreign minister for a little more than two years, will need to be ratified by the two chambers of parliament.

To judge from the favourable opinions so far expressed on television by several deputies and senators, the president's decision will be confirmed without difficulty by the two chambers, which are dominated by Aristide's political movement Lavalas.

Werleigh, aged 49, comes from a wealthy family from Cap-Haïtien, the country's second-largest town. After paramedical and legal studies in Haiti, Europe and the United States, she spent several years working on programmes to eradicate illiteracy and to train the poor farmers of northern Haiti.

In 1976 Werleigh, who is a progressive Christian, was appointed head of the Catholic organisation Caritas for Latin America and the Caribbean, a job she held for almost 10 years.

She was briefly minister of social affairs in the transitional government headed by Ertha Pascal Trouillot in 1990. Her ties with Aristide became closer during the president's exile in Washington.

It was then that Werleigh became one of Aristide's most valued advisers. Her name was often mentioned as a possible prime minister when Aristide returned to Haiti a year ago. But under pressure from the country's principal donors, the president preferred to appoint Michel, a prominent Port-au-Prince businessman.

Michel's resignation and, even more, Aristide's acceptance of it illustrate a tendency that an economist close to government circles describes as "backtracking on the issue of structural adjustment".

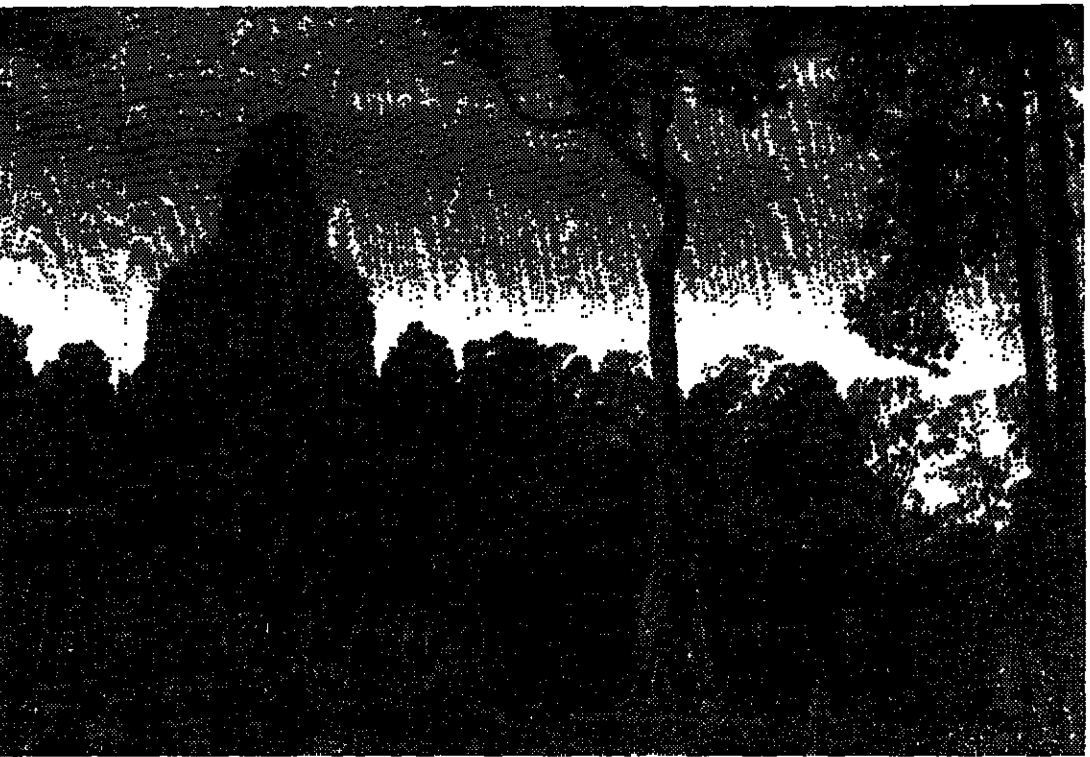
Despite opposition from some of the president's advisers and the Lavalas majority in parliament, Michel had fought hard to push through the privatisation of the nine largest state-owned companies and to obtain a new agreement with the International Monetary Fund.

Despite being leant on heavily by the US vice-president, Al Gore, during his visit to Port-au-Prince a week ago, Aristide decided not to side with his prime minister on those two questions, which were presented as being crucial to the continuation of international aid. Werleigh did not adopt a public stance on the issue.

In the run-up to the presidential elections, which are due to be held by the end of the year, Aristide's supporters have been clamouring increasingly for him to remain in power for three more years so as to compensate for his period in exile.

During a recent visit to the working-class district of Bel-Air, in the heart of the capital, Aristide gave an ambiguous response to such calls that was in marked contrast with his repeated promises to vacate the presidential seat next February. "I cannot but listen to what you are asking," he told the crowds.

(October 25)



Written in stone . . . Although Angkor is well protected, 90 per cent of Khmer art has been destroyed

Thieves pilfer Cambodia's past

Jean-Claude Pomonti in Phnom Penh

THE Cambodian government has called again for urgent action to halt the theft of ancient Khmer artefacts, which continues at an alarming rate. Most of the objects concerned are ceramics, statues and bas-reliefs located in dozens of temples in the west and north of the country, which are much more difficult to protect than the Angkor National Park.

In February, police operating 50km from Angkor arrested five smugglers, one of them Thai, in possession of five heads of statues they had bought at the market in Siem Reap, the town closest to the temples. At the beginning of September, a policeman was reportedly killed as he tried to prevent a similar theft at Siem Reap.

The smuggling of Khmer art, often across the border to Thailand, is encouraged by private American, European and Japanese collectors, who sometimes then sell their booty to museums.

At the end of last month, the Phnom Penh authorities demanded the repatriation of five pieces dating from the 7th and 8th centuries — in other words, from the pre-Angkor period — which they said were currently on show in the US. The Cambodian culture minister, Nouth Narang, claimed the items had been stolen.

The Paris peace accords of 1991 and the subsequent intervention of UN peacekeepers from March 1992 to September 1993 opened Cambodia up to the outside world, and thus made it easier for thieves to smuggle out Khmer art.

Armed gangs acting on information provided by bogus tourists moved into action, even in the Angkor National Park. But the monuments worst affected were temples located outside the park in inaccessible regions where there has been a breakdown in law and order.

The Khmer Rouge has had no qualms about taking its cut from such a lucrative traffic: smugglers regularly pass through areas that it used to control, and in some cases still controls, along the Thai border.

Various steps have been taken to curb these activities. In 1993, some of the 5,000 items kept at the Angkor Conservation Agency, which had been attacked at least three times by armed commandos between November 1992 and April 1993, were transferred to the Royal Palace in Phnom Penh.

France trained a unit of 500 guards for Angkor and gave them the equipment they needed — radios, light arms and 350 Japanese motorcycles. Since June 1994, squads of motorcyclists have been ready to respond immediately to calls from guards posted at the entrances to temples.

Furthermore, co-ordination procedures set up at that time between Interpol and the relevant Cambodian departments (customs, defence, culture) made it easier to keep track of the network of thieves.

In the two months that followed, Angkor guards carried out 21 arrests and recovered 18 items. Within the park, restoration work and guided tours were resumed under reasonable conditions of security. But those conditions do not yet exist at the temple of Banteay Srei, one of the finest examples of Khmer art, located 20km to the north. Thieves have also been at work elsewhere, sometimes causing irreparable damage in the course of stealing a single item.

The Cambodian authorities are often unable to identify, and therefore recover, valuable items on show in antique shops outside the country. It has taken five years, for example, to gather enough evidence to make it possible to retrieve 13 priceless Angkor statues that the Thai authorities themselves wanted to return to Cambodia. The statues had been seized by police at Bangkok antique shops at the request of the Thai Department of Fine Arts.

A study carried out by the French Far Eastern School in 1993 concluded that 90 per cent of the Cambodian cultural heritage had been destroyed during the 23 years of war. Efforts undertaken since then to save what can be saved have borne fruit, but the market in Khmer art remains lucrative and smuggling continues, even if it is on a smaller scale than before.

(October 25)

Chopin ends on a sour note

Jan Krauze reports from Warsaw on the world's most prestigious piano competition

THE 13th Chopin Competition, which ended on October 19, was dominated by the Russian pianist Alexei Sultanov, whose artistic personality is as powerful as his behaviour is discourteous.

He was conspicuously absent from the prize-giving ceremony and the closing concert given by the prizewinners, of whom he was one. Six years after winning the highly regarded Van Cliburn Competition, Sultanov had come to Warsaw to put his reputation to the test of the formidable and prestigious Chopin Competition, which is held every five years.

Did he feel that victory should have been his by right? Did the ovations from an audience that adored his playing go to his head? Whatever the case, he seemed to regard it as an insult to his talent that he should have to share second prize with the French pianist Philippe Giusiano, whose style is in many ways the antithesis of Sultanov's.

To add insult to injury, the jury decided for the second time running not to award a first prize. Last year, similar severity was shown by the jury of the Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow, in both the violin and piano sections.

There can be no doubt that the decision of the Chopin Competition jury came as an unpleasant surprise to the six pianists who had managed to reach the final after almost three weeks of competition.

It was also frustrating for the public, who had faithfully followed their progress from round to round. But the marking system is rigid: pianists get a certain number of marks at the end of each round, and a computer works out the total without the jury intervening in any way. As none of the finalists had notched up the minimum marks to be able to claim the first prize, there was no alternative but to withhold it.

Was the jury too severe? Perhaps they felt they could not place the 1995 prizewinners in the same category as some illustrious winners of earlier competitions, such as Maurizio Pollini, Martha Argerich and Krystian Zimerman.

It could also be that it was impossible to choose between a brilliant virtuoso like Sultanov, who takes liberties with tradition and sometimes lapses into bad taste, and a pianist like Giusiano, who possesses great finesse but perhaps lacks punch.

Giusiano, who is from Marseilles, was chancing his arm when he decided to have a second stab at the Chopin Competition. He had given a much-remarked performance at the previous competition in 1990, when he was just 17 — the minimum age required by the regulations.

Giusiano is a pianist who is faithful to the score, refuses overemphasis, and combines subtlety and elegance with a discreet use of rubato and an impeccable technique. Yet something is lacking — not so much in his playing, perhaps, as in his general demeanour.

He seems to hold himself back, to be constrained by his own modesty. Both off stage, when he was perspiring heavily and trembling with emotion after his final round, and on stage at the end of the closing concert, when he was encored, he seemed to tense up rather than give free rein to his joy. One hopes that this success will help him to make his playing a touch more brilliant and well-rounded.

The competition revealed or confirmed the talent of several other pianists, not just among the prizewinners. Gabriela Montero, a US citizen of Venezuelan origin who won third prize, is a pianist of considerable temperament. Unlike Giusiano and Sultanov, who preferred not to comment on the jury's decision to award no first prize, she said she thought it was "unfair", as she felt the level of the competition had been "high enough for there to be a first prize".

Rem Ourasin, winner of the fourth prize, is a very brilliant young Tatar from Russia who seems to have reserves that will enable him to improve considerably. Also worth a mention is the blind Italian pianist, Luigi Carlia, who won the hearts of the public and achieved the feat of getting through to the third round.

Whether there is a clear winner or opinions are divided, as they were this year, the Chopin Competition tends to follow the same pattern. It is a long-drawn-out and rather artificial contest that requires battalions of hopefuls to take it in turns to tackle the same hackneyed works. But without warning it may be galvanised by a spark of true inspiration.

One's weariness with the unchanging musical diet then vanishes, and everything — including the competition itself, the plethora of notes, the overabundance of candidates and the surfeit of Chopin — suddenly seems justified.

(October 24)

Le Monde

Directeur: Jean-Marie Colombani

PROJECT MANAGER

AGRICULTURAL REHABILITATION PROJECT, NORTHERN ETHIOPIA

SCF started work in Ethiopia in 1973 with an emergency relief programme in response to the famine of that year. Since then SCF has been involved in a range of longer-term relief and development programmes to secure lasting benefits for children.

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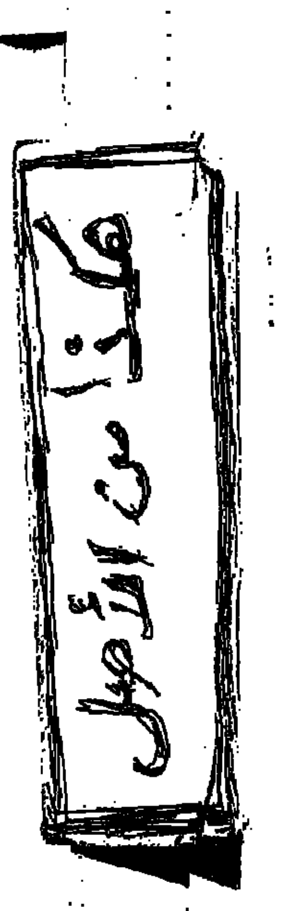
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Department of Computer Science and Information Systems
Faculty of Science

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The Department of Computer Science and Information Systems at St. John's, Brunel University, West London, invites applications for lectureships to commence January 1996. These appointments continue the rapid research-led expansion programme of the Department and build on a profile of innovative teaching and research in applied computing at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. This expansion has already seen the appointment of a new Chair and eight new academic staff.

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The Department's undergraduate and postgraduate teaching reflects this wide range of research interests. The Department is currently undertaking a rapid expansion of its Masters programme to further develop timely, novel and industrially relevant postgraduate programmes. The Masters courses will also feed into the undergraduate programmes, continuing the Department's reputation for producing strong, marketable undergraduates.

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Salary will be within the Lecturer A scale, £15,154 - £19,848, or Lecturer B scale, £20,677 - £26,430, depending on experience. Salary also attracts the London Allowance of £2,166 per annum. The closing date for applications is 10 November 1995.

For further details, please send a self-addressed envelope to Personnel Services, Brunel University, Uxbridge, Middlesex UB8 3PH, quoting reference number 5465 on both envelopes. Professor Ray J. Paul, Head of Department, also welcomes informal enquiries. He can be contacted by telephone on 01895 203374, by fax on 01895 203391, or by email at Ray.Paul@Brunel.ac.uk.

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Application forms and further particulars may be obtained from Personnel Services, University of St Andrews, College Gate, North Street, St Andrews, Fife KY16 9AJ or by telephoning 01334 462564 during office hours, 01334 462571 out of hours, by fax 01334 462570 or by e-mail MEL1@st-andrews.ac.uk, to whom completed applications accompanied by a CV and letter of application should be returned to arrive not later than Monday 13 November 1995. Please quote reference ML/AHI4004.

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Application forms and further particulars are available from Personnel Services, University of Aberdeen, Regent Walk, Aberdeen, AB9 1FX, telephone +44 (01224) 272727 quoting reference number MOG 011R. A 24-hour answering service is in operation.

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Fine chronicler of the changing countryside

Ralph Whitlock

RALPH WHITLOCK, who has died aged 81, was one of the most popular writers the Guardian Weekly has ever had. He started his country articles for the paper in 1981 and they have continued to interest and delight readers throughout the world ever since. He wrote of a Wiltshire, indeed an England, that was changing rapidly, and if he regretted some of the things that were happening to the villages and the countryside it was not with nostalgia for a golden age in the past because the past was seldom golden, especially in the days of the Enclosures, the Game Laws, and agricultural depression.

He was born in the village of Pitton, six miles from Salisbury, where there were Whitlocks on the first page of the parish register, which began about 1650. At one time in the 19th century nearly a quarter of the 380 inhabitants were Whitlocks, and most of the rest were related. Some were prosperous, many were poor.



Ralph's grandfather was an agricultural labourer who died when the three children were small, leaving his widow to bring them up on a pauper allowance of five shillings a week and two loaves of warehouse bread. Ralph's father Ted left school at 12 and started work as a shepherd boy, eventually becoming a farmer. He died six weeks short of his 90th birthday, collapsing when he was putting on his boots to go to market.

Ralph described himself as the child of middle-aged parents — his father was 40 when Ralph was born in February 1914. He was brought up on the family farm, where conversation tended to look back to Edwardian and Victorian times. Day began with family prayers, and he retained a deep, simple Christian faith to the end. When his wife Hilda suffered a massive brain haemorrhage he was sustained by the knowledge that prayers were being said for her all over Wiltshire — and beyond. Whatever the cause, she made a full recovery.

He began to write about village events for the local paper in 1930. In 1932 he started a weekly column of country notes for the Western Gazette group of newspapers which continued for more than 60 years. He began to write for The Field in 1944 and became its farming editor for more than 30 years. In 1945 he began broadcasting for the BBC and soon became a popular commentator on agricultural and country matters — he also had a regular spot on Children's Hour, later going on to television.

Between 1968 and 1973 he was agricultural consultant to the Methodist Missionary Society, travelling extensively for them in Africa, India, and the Caribbean,



Nature's friend: Ralph as a young man with badger

He retired to Somerset, but 10 years later went back to Wiltshire, settling in the village of Winterlow, a few miles from Pitton. From there he kept up a prolific production of books on the countryside, agriculture, and natural history, as well as his newspaper articles — he wrote more than 100 books in all.

There were few days, however, when he missed walking in the Bentley Wood nature reserve, a 1,700-acre forest near Winterlow, of which he was trustee and honorary custodian. He knew it intimately — where the badgers' holts were to be found, where to go to hear the nightingales or see the butterflies.

In his preface to a selection of his Guardian Weekly articles, Letters From An English Village, published in 1988, he wrote:

"I often think, when I am composing these weekly letters, of my illustrious predecessors — Gilbert White, writing from Selborne, Richard Jefferies at Coate, W H Hudson, who haunts around Winterbourne Bishop (Martin). I know well the tragic genius of John Clare. Clare lamented the passing of the England of open fields, then dissolving before his eyes; Hudson witnessed the final chapter of the golden age of downland sheep; Jefferies was aware of the amoeba of Swindon reaching out to engulf his beloved countryside. And I too am a chronicler of a passing age. Indeed, earlier this very year [1988] my book, The Lost Village, has commemorated not a village that has physically foundered but a way of life that has irretrievably vanished into the mists of time.

But Nadderbourne [his fictional name for Pitton], like other villages of today, is still vibrantly alive, though vastly changed. Reckoning as a newcomer someone who has put down roots within the past twenty years, 80 per cent of the village's present inhabitants are newcomers. But the 20 per cent residue evidently act as leaven, and the mixture is potent. The village flourishes as never before. Certainly it is far more affluent, and, while the generations I can remember would feel lost there, the present generation is contented enough.

Enough of the abiding things of the countryside survive for me to feel at home there, too. There are still skylarks unwinding their silver skein of song over the cornfields, still roseattes of primroses in the April hedgebanks, still rooks in the trees of Church Farm (though they have to nest in ash-trees since Dutch elm disease destroyed the elms), still housewives enjoying a little gossip as they meet in the village shop.

My father once greeted a newcomer with, "Well, old man, you be come to Nadderbourne to live, and you be come to Nadderbourne to die."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, nobody who comes to Nadderbourne ever wants to go away and die somewhere else!"

That is the village I know, and — praise be! — there are still nine thousand or more like it in England."

John Perkin

Ralph Whitlock, countryman and writer, born February 7, 1914; died October 22, 1995

Poetry's exuberant subversive

Gavin Ewart

GAVIN EWART, who has died aged 79, was one of the most prolific English poets of the century, and this despite a silent period of some 25 years. He was also one of the most engaging, both on the page and in person — warm, witty, various, funny (though not frivolous), and deeply humane.

Although a thirties poet, there was nothing grand about Gavin. Because of his gift for friendliness and his exuberant subversion of literary propriety, he seemed a contemporary to a generation of poets who were half his age.

Gavin Ewart was educated at Wellington school and Cambridge university — though anyone less influenced by Leavis would be hard to imagine. He developed his poetic talent early and had poems published in New Verse magazine and the Listener when he was 17. His first collection, Poems And Songs, was published in 1939.

He served in the Royal Artillery from 1940-46 — his experiences forming the subject of several later poems — and on his return to civilian life, worked for the British Council before going into advertising:

Advertising. Advertising. Fatal
Lady of the Lake!
No one opts for copyrighting, they
get in there by mistake.

To all intents and purposes, he entered poetic oblivion. The renaisscence, when it came, was explosive; The Pleasures Of The Flesh (1966) being followed by a bibliographer's nightmare of publications, culminating in two massive Collecteds — 1933-80, and 1980-90. Ewart brought to poetry the ability to see that any number of emperors were walking about in the all together. And it was with the unembarrassed acceptance of the realities of life, especially with reference to sex, that Ewart shocked.

Hands that wiped arses
are holding glasses,
lips that fellated
are intoxicated,

is the memorable opening to one among dozens of unabashed poems about being truly human.

But although he wrote easily, fluently and funnily about the 20th century's favourite pastime, Ewart did not have a one-track mind. War, death (an increasing preoccupation in later years), religion, cricket, history and the literary world were all subjected to Ewart's acid directness. Also politics. At the time of Sir John Betjeman's death, in 1984, Ewart's was one of the many names bandied about as a possible successor as Poet Laureate. He was obviously too radical — too rude — to be a serious consideration. But, in fact, he was the unofficial laureate of the Thatcher years (and beyond), Mrs Thatcher herself described gloriously as "a fake-lady bossyboots from Grantham". His own politics were liberal leftwing, anti-authoritarian, anti-privilege but always with a fine dash of independence. He was the last person to bow to the storm of political correctness:

American fatties are
wonderful people, they
take up two seats in a
train or a bus . . .

He was a disciple of Auden ("best poet since Pope"), but although he produced a "wonderful hybrid rose that crossed the comic with the tragic", the resulting poetry was very different. Ewart had nothing



of Auden's magisterial authority, and no time for philosophical abstractions. Rather, he was a completely unbuttoned, companionable poet in the mode of the mature Byron. Nothing was too inconsequential for his muse, or to share with his readers. This led some to write him off as light-weight, but every poem was instinct with a clubbable humanity. Although his preparedness to experiment in form was as great as Auden's, his was a more casual relationship, resulting in a string of "So-Called Sonnets" and other poems that ambled semi-iambically through the gist of what he had to say. But if he left no undisputedly great individual poems, the effect of his work in its generous plenitude is striking and deserves to be long kept in print. Although there is a case for a substantial Selected Poems, it is to be hoped that his publishers, Hutchinson, will keep the two Collecteds in print for the forseeable future.

Gavin was a wonderful reader of his own work, performing on the circuit long after most poets hang up their boots. The contrast between his slightly old-world delivery and the sometimes scabrous contents of the poems produced a special frisson. He also tutored on many writing courses, and was a tireless correspondent and sender of postcards. These would arrive in re-cycled envelopes, as often as not marked with a Biro'd message about saving trees, written out in his small neat handwriting.

In addition to writing adult poetry, he was also a children's writer, an anthologist, a reviewer and a librettist. He was chairman of the Poetry Society from 1978 to 1979.

Gavin Ewart will be widely missed by his readers, and long mourned by all who knew him.

Simon Rae

Gavin Buchanan Ewart, born February 4, 1916; died October 23, 1995

Hard cell for soft energy

A spin-off from space will soon be providing clean power for Chicago buses. **Tim Radford** reports

WHEN IT comes to cutting traffic fumes, Chicago is not going to miss the bus. Next year the city will begin using three prototype buses powered by fuel cells of a type abandoned after the Gemini space programme but resurrected by a small Canadian firm of engineers. The only stuff coming out of the exhaust pipes will be warm water vapour.

A fuel cell is a bit of clean technology that doesn't involve burning. In its ideal version, you just rub hydrogen and oxygen together and get water, heat and a lot of electricity. There is plenty of oxygen on Earth, the one element the universe is not going to run out of is hydrogen, and no one ever complained about water as a pollutant.

The late Isaac Asimov said that if the cells ever worked properly they would make small-scale electricity production unprecedentedly cheap and clean but, as far as he was concerned, they remained a "laboratory curiosity". He said that in 1964, when fuel cells were already being burnished to provide heating and electrical power for the Gemini project that put the first US astronauts into Earth-orbit, but he had a point.

Fuel cells had been a laboratory curiosity for a long time. Sir William Grove, a London barrister, had invented the first in 1839. He was born in 1811 (a good year for science and engineering, having also seen the birth of, among others, Bunsen of the burner, and Simpson, the doctor who used chloroform on Queen Victoria). Grove was also keen on the idea of the conservation of energy, and somewhat ahead of his time.

There are now four or five distinct types of fuel cell. An alkaline version provided power and water for both the Apollo programme and the space shuttle, but the one that has most interested Ballard Power Systems of Vancouver is called a PEM or proton exchange membrane. It consists of a "solid" electrolyte — sulphuric acid bonded to Teflon — with a carbon cathode and anode, each with a platinum catalyst on the inside. "If you provide hydrogen to one side and oxygen from the air to the other side, you'll make electricity," says Firoz Rasul, the president and chief executive of the company.

The principle is simple though the technology is tricky, but the latest version is now a cell less than half a millimetre thick. In its most basic form, it is a piece of clear polymer in a channelled graphite sandwich — channelled to allow the passage of hydrogen or methanol, which contains a lot of hydrogen, to the membrane — and it will produce 250 amps. This is enough to look after the average home's needs, but the voltage is very low. You increase the voltage by stacking the cells together.

Rasul has just announced that a cubic foot or so (0.03 cu metres) of these sandwiches can generate 28 kilowatts, and he and his colleagues can pack a stack of them light enough to wind up a full-sized city bus to 200kW (275hp) and keep the bus running in traffic for 400km. It will, they told an international Grove fuel cell conference in Britain last month, deliver the same top speed and hill-climbing capability as a diesel-powered bus but the acceleration will be better. Chicago is putting up $5.8 million. For that, they get a bus that can be refuelled at a central point in 11 minutes (as opposed to the other kind of electric bus, which might take eight hours to recharge).

If engineers can get on with another technology called regenerative braking, which can recover energy from the effort needed to stop, and put it back into the system, Chicago could end up with a bus capable of 560km for a fuel tank full of hydrogen. The city will also have kept up with its Clean Air Act objectives: if it likes the experiment, it will consider converting the whole fleet as the buses become due for replacement.

Ballard picked up the Gemini space programme PEM technology after the patents had expired, and got involved with Johnson Matthey in Britain and Daimler Benz in Germany. The real triumph, as Firoz Rasul sees it, is the achievement of greater energy densities: more bang for the same buck.

HE SAID: "Three years ago we used to produce five kilowatts — which is about enough power for your home — from a cubic foot of stuff weighing about 90lb. In 1993, we increased that to 10kW for the same space and same weight. In 1994, we doubled that to 20kW. Our goal this year was to get to 25, which is what the auto companies have told us is the requirement to make a car perform in the same manner and the same range as the internal combustion engine. We have got to 28."

Fuel cells have long been promoted as the technology of tomorrow. Even now, nobody is making any money out of it. But the hunger for power is matched by alarm about pollution. "I think the difference this time is that there is a driving need: we cannot continue to live the way we do now."

There are other advantages. Entire nations may be persuaded that fuel cells are an answer. The trouble with national grids is that some countries don't have them, and those that do lose huge quantities of power at every junction. So Firoz sees fuel cells as portable power packs in the developing world, reliable local supplies for distant communities, or instantly available standby systems for hospitals — membrane fuel cells are in business within microseconds.

Big opportunities loom: in the US, the power utilities are being deregulated; there will be openings for those who want to compete with the monoliths. Rasul talks of the computer revolution, from mainframes to PCs. "Exactly the same kind of revolution is beginning to happen in the energy business. You put the plant where the user is and provide clean and quiet power. Fuel cells are very appropriate." The future hasn't arrived yet, and the experience of the Chicago Transit Authority could be crucial.

"We start with larger vehicles that can take more weight and more cost, and then we move eventually to the automobile around 2003," says Rasul. "But buses? We are already building them. We see them being commercialised by 1998."

The firm estimates that by 2003 — when clean air and global warming legislation takes effect and 10 per cent of new US cars emit no polluting exhaust at all — there will be a $3 billion market for automotive fuel cells in North America alone.

"Why do we have cars in the first place? It's for personal freedom. We don't want to be worried about having to recharge in 50 miles and being tied to an umbilical cord for another eight hours before we can re-use it. That's what is driving the market," Rasul said.

Shackled by marriage

Michael Freedland on a campaign by women to change Orthodox Jewish divorce law

IT WAS just two months ago that the chains were unlocked from Gloria Proops's ankles. Twenty years of imprisonment were finally ended. Now she is at the forefront of the campaign to release the shackles of hundreds of other women in Britain. Last month, 50 women wreathed in chains demonstrated outside the office of the Chief Rabbi, Dr Jonathan Sacks, to protest against the ties that bind them into marriages that the divorce courts of Britain have already decided are over.

As members of the Orthodox Jewish community, these women are subject to the 2,000-year-old religious law declaring a woman unable to consider her marriage over until her husband grants her a bill of divorce, a *get*. Without that, she not only cannot remarry in a religious ceremony, but any children of a second marriage are regarded as bastards, *mamzerim*. Ironically, children are considered to be illegitimate not if their parents are not married at all, but if they have contracted an "illegal" marriage. By that same law, an illegitimate child could marry only another illegitimate person.

When they demonstrated in London last month the "chained women", as they call themselves, were near despair. Now they see a glimmer of light at the end of a very long tunnel. Dr Sacks has issued a statement saying he is committed to easing their path. A spokesperson for his office says: "We are within inches of getting something done."

If the law does change, it will be too late for women like Gloria Proops. "I would have married a man who was very Orthodox," she explains, "and who considered that without my having a *get*, we would be committing adultery. We never made love, all we ever did was hold hands. When my ex-husband refused to give me a *get*, it was all over." Today, she does have a relationship "on the sidelines", but she doesn't think it will result in marriage. "I have lost my chance."

Now 55 and with two sons and a daughter all in their thirties, she has set up a support group of other chained women — *aqunot*, in Hebrew. "It's a question of women knowing there are others in their position and of being able to put pressure on the religious establishment. I was angry with my husband, of course, but I was really angry at the religious authorities."

They, for their part, are unmoved. Whatever Dr Sacks does, Orthodox rabbis maintain, he cannot unmake religious law. There have been no new gatherings of rabbis to make new laws since the Talmud was compiled before the days of Jesus.



Chain gang . . . protesters in London PHOTOGRAPH: FRANK MARTIN

Rabbi Dr Jeffery Cohen, head of one of London's largest congregations at Stanmore, disagrees. "Jewish law is capable of dramatic changes when there is a will to make them. And this is one area in which there should be a dramatic change." For the present, the best that can be hoped for is a new prenuptial agreement, which all prospective bridegrooms would have to sign before marrying in an Orthodox synagogue, promising to go before a religious court if the marriage breaks down.

Two women judges, Dawn Freedman and Myrella Cohen, have been advising the Chief Rabbi on trying to find a way out. Judge Cohen says: "Countless women are trapped in a 'limping marriage'. The number of human tragedies like this is escalating with the increase in civil divorce."

She hopes that the Lord Chancellor's changes to divorce law will encompass Jewish requirements that no civil divorce be granted until a *get* is discharged, or no divorce made absolute while there is a religious bar to marriage.

Rabbi Cohen says: "The prenuptial agreement would not force a man to offer a *get*, but would enable the Chief Rabbi's court, the Beth Din, to say: 'You are still married, therefore you must pay your wife maintenance. Let's say £2,000 a week.' Should he refuse, the alternative could be his agreement to give a divorce."

Still haunted by the dingo

Christopher Zinn in Sydney

IT SEEMED impossible that there could be any other follow-up. Many journalists had jettisoned their bulky files years ago; others had consigned the yellowing piles of newsprint to the drawer marked "history, to be reopened only on anniversaries". After two inquests, a trial and two appeals, a royal commission and a Hollywood movie starring Meryl Streep, it appeared unlikely there was any conceivable angle left in the whole sorry saga.

But the so-called "dingo baby case" has sprung back into the headlines with another baffling twist. The case has been reopened — at the request of the child's parents.

Lindy Chamberlain was accused of cutting her baby Azaria's throat, then blaming her disappearance on a dingo. She was demonised in the press, vilified because she didn't grieve publicly enough for her lost child. She spent three years in jail for murder, before a new inquest led to her release.

Now 47 and living in Seattle with a new husband nine years her junior, she wants the Australian authorities to acknowledge that Azaria was not murdered, but abducted by a dingo, as she has always claimed. "It doesn't take away the past ache and hurt," she has said, "but it should be finished the right way."

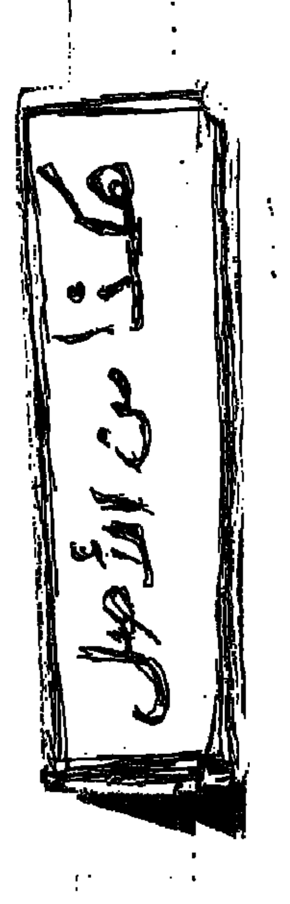
The baby's father Michael, who was given a suspended sentence for being an accessory after the fact of murder, and who is also remarried, explains why, after all the pain, humiliation and expense, he wants to go back to court. "This will leave the way clear for my daughter to have a proper burial at Ayers Rock. Ever since our exoneration in 1988, the thing that has stuck in our gizzard is the result of the second inquiry, that the baby was murdered."

It all began on August 17, 1980 on a camp site at Ayers Rock, when Lindy returned to the family tent and cried out: "My God. My God. The dingo's got my baby."

Lindy's fatalism, largely due to her and Michael's faith as Seventh Day Adventists, convinced many people that she was responsible. Rumours began to circulate; one even claimed that the name Azaria meant "a sacrifice in the wilderness".

It took eight years to quash Lindy's life sentence and clear her name. In 1992, the Northern Territory Government made ex gratia payments of almost £700,000 to the Chamberlains for their wrongful conviction. Nevertheless, a recent survey showed that 25 per cent of Australians still believe Lindy did it.

It seems unlikely that any resumed inquest will turn up new evidence about the role of the dingo in Azaria's death. But even if the Chamberlains go through the last legal hoop and clear their names to their satisfaction, there is no doubt the legend of what really happened to Azaria will go on for ever.



Fair weather friend

CINEMA
Derek Malcolm

WHEN independent film-makers get picked up for a song by Hollywood, they invariably believe they can beat the system and make something they want. Few succeed. But Gus Van Sant, nurtured on the festival circuit — where Mala Noche, his first feature about a gay Portland liquor store clerk's love of Mexican boys, thrived — looked as if he'd made the difficult transition.

Drugstore Cowboy had to be toned down in case anyone thought Matt Dillon's drug addict was too much of a hero for our time, and My Own Private Idaho was at first relegated to art houses, but both films did better business than expected. Then came Even Cowgirls Get The Blues, freely adapted from Tom Robbins's cult seventies novel, which was a comprehensive critical and commercial disaster.

The low-budget **To Die For** is something of a return to form. While it still seems impossible, at least in the present conservative climate, that the idiosyncratic Van Sant could ever wholly embrace commercial values, this mordant satire on the American obsession with fame has a light enough touch to please a wide audience.

Its "problem" is that Nicole Kidman's anti-heroine, a weather presenter on small-town cable television who is prepared to murder to get what she wants, isn't exactly a feel-good character and hardly procures us the happiest of endings. Black irony is not what studios want these days, even when right somehow wins out over wrong.

The surprise is not just that Van Sant was able to do it but that Kidman extends her range so well. As Suzanne Stone, the dim but remorselessly ambitious character she plays, narrates her story, Van Sant uses television clichés to counterpoint a deglamorised reality. What's more, he doesn't need over-the-top acting to emphasise either the darkness of his vision or his saving sense of humour. So the story of the weather girl who marries Matt Dillon's easy-going son of an Italian restaurant owner and then finds that he stands in the way of fame, remains a comedy with meaning rather than a hell-for-leather farce.

As Suzanne forces Wayne Knight's station head into approving her project for a programme about high school kids, and then betrays the three no-hopers who adore her, the film seems as much a thriller as an extravagantly imagined moral fable. Van Sant and his star judge it to perfection, while Dillon, Illeana Douglas, George Segal and Alison Folland give equally sure performances.

The film isn't entirely successful and only just sustains its 107 minutes, being funnier in its first half than it is in its tougher but more predictable second.

The joke about television and the media wears thin. But the whole remains an entertaining exposure of celebrity worship in America and the consequent unreality of our view of the world. For Van Sant, it is a step towards the mainstream that keeps his independence of mind intact, and for Kidman, surprisingly cast by Jane Campion as Isabelle Archer in her forthcoming adaptation of Henry James's Portrait Of A Lady, it is a triumph.



Sunny side up . . . Nicole Kidman as the lethally ambitious TV presenter in Gus Van Sant's To Die For

I interviewed Jiri Menzel once, at a time when the cherished Czech director of Closely Observed Trains had just been permitted, after a ban lasting years, to make a film again. I asked him through his interpreter whether he had actually been able to achieve what he wanted.

"Oh yes," the translator replied as Menzel kicked me hard under the table, "it was a wonderful experience." The interpreter was, of course, also his government minder. Ever since then, the director has tenderly inquired after my shins.

He may want to kick them again after this review since, now Menzel can do what he wants again, finance willing, he seems to have lost form. The old fire that made Closely Observed Trains a masterpiece of delicate irony seems to be doused.

Perhaps this adaptation of Vladimir Voinovich's **The Life and Extraordinary Times of Private Ivan Chonkin**, which caused its author to be stripped of his Russian citizenship in 1980, was too facile a project for Menzel, since it is about an innocent who somehow manages to remain uncorrupted in the Soviet Union's brutish Stalinist years.

Whatever, this British-produced co-production between the UK, France, Italy, the Czech Republic and Russia fails to ignite as it should. It seems almost slackly directed. This has a coarser tone to it and a less innocent approach.

Chonkin, nicely played by Gennadiy Nazarov, is a humble soldier in the Soviet army sent to a remote village called Red End to guard a crashed plane. Although quickly straining the bedsprings of the local postmistress, he is almost as quickly regarded as a possible spy by the suspicious villagers. The secret police are soon called in.

When the war with Germany starts, matters take an even worse turn and a whole battalion is summoned. But somehow the amiable Chonkin manages to turn everything to his advantage.

The film seems like an easy laugh at the expense of communism. But that could be because the writing doesn't seem bright enough and Menzel's detail has lost the ability to delight with irreverence.

In the end, though the film is certainly fun and contains some telling moments, Chonkin appears merely a pale shadow of the good soldier Schweik, while the rest of the cast march in and out of frame very much as caricatures rather than characters.

Could the advent of capitalism in Russia or eastern Europe, played as comedy, seem any less absurd than these communist cavortings?

Keeping one step ahead of events

DANCE
Judith Mackrell

"*IT'S A* bit like watching people in the street . . . it goes on from day to day, some things repeat, some things change, you never see the same performance twice." As Merce Cunningham says, one good reason why he came up with the Event was that it would keep him supplied with changing views of his choreography. The other was that it would allow his company to perform in spaces as unlikely as gyms or tiny Indian dance theatres or as ordinary as the Riverside Studios in Hammersmith, west London.

A Cunningham Event is basically a collage of extracts taken from existing works, stitched together with sequences of new choreography and allowed to run as a seamless performance. The order of dances can change every night and the material is chosen to suit the quirks and limits of the venue.

The Event gives Cunningham the fun of revisiting parts of his repertory (and at 76 he now has a huge oeuvre). It gives audiences the hypnotic pleasure of slipping into 90 minutes of extraordinary and entrancing dance.

For his current season of Riverside Events Cunningham has put his dancers in front of a huge painting by Robert Rauschenberg — a racily energetic collage.

It is pleasurably easy to get almost stoned on the choreography's richness, letting one's gaze drift between connecting shapes and jigsaw puzzle rhythms. But certain moments keep startling us back into brisk attention — like the flurry of jumping arabesques where the dancers' limbs twitch with random sparks of electricity. Or the sweetly curving duet where two dancers seem locked into a tiny intimate space.

The Event was not, though, just about all the pure and intricate movement Cunningham has ever made. It was also, disconcertingly and wittily, about jokes and play acting. Four dancers in baseball boots bounce on to the stage and are suddenly dancing jigs and striking histrionic poses. Cunningham then dances his first solo and we all sit enthralled as this most refined dance intelligence perches on a chair and pulls faces at us, swapping exaggerated scowls, grins and sighs of ennui like theatre masks. Later a pattern of deftly stepping dancers turns into a crowd of manic eccentrics and Cunningham threads a path through them, a stiff wayward curmudgeon in a black suit. The dance and the stories change so fast you cannot keep track.

Cunningham is not just a maker of fabulous dance but also a great man of the theatre.

Herve Robbe and Richard Deacon's **Factory** is for anyone who's never been able to afford a stalls seat and never managed to push their way to the front of the crowd. Just when you think you're stuck behind the world's biggest hair, the audience parts, the dancers come right up to you and you've suddenly got the best view in the house.

Riverside Studio One has been stripped of its seating. The audience mills around in its dark empty space encountering six dancers, the large, curvy wooden forms of Deacon's installation and a huge light-diffusing sculpture. The dancers perform Robbe's slow, clean-lined movement, sometimes lying on Deacon's sculptures, and move around the crowd with a wordless, calm tenacity.

The result is a genuinely intimate experience — as the dancers brush past we find ourselves staring straight into their eyes; when we lose sight of them we can climb on the sculptures. Theory junkies could analyse at length this novel democratisation of stage space, this transformation of the audience from voyeurs to performers (when the dancers start moving right next to us we're suddenly co-opted into the scene as human backdrop and chorus). But it is the live details that are most engaging — like the man in the crowd who suddenly finds a woman lying by his foot and becomes twitchily uncertain whether he should move it; or the dancer who courteously offers you his hand to move you off one of Deacon's sculptures; or the audience's descent into jollity as they compete to play see-saw on the wonderfully frictionless sculptures. At 60 minutes the piece is a nicely judged mix of performance, party and trip to an art gallery — its seriousness tempered by real fun.

Boy bounces back to form

MUSIC
Caroline Sullivan

THIS one-off show at London's Shepherd's Bush Empire, Boy George's only appearance in Britain this year, was scheduled for early September, but postponed when his brother, Gerald O'Dowd, was arrested for murder. The tragedy came during one of the less tempestuous periods of his life, with heroin addiction long behind him and a well-received autobiography and new album out.

Having had several weeks to assimilate the shock, George was in good form last week. He refrained from mentioning Gerald, as did the fans; before he appeared, the talk in the back row of the balcony was of support act Noella Hutton, who had screamed and frothed like a rabid P J Harvey. We'll hear more from her, I fear.

But what was this entering in a baggy suit and short black hair under a pert red trilby? A kinder, gentler — nay, humbler — Boy George? Who'd have thought it? Amazing the transformation that relatively low album sales can wreak. But, George being George, he didn't hesitate to lay into those he blames for the unimpressive chart performance of his latest opus, Cheapness And Beauty. Now that he's completely out of the closet, he said huffily, why weren't "other queens" showing solidarity by buying the album?

George's image has changed drastically since his superstar days. His music has undergone even more of a refit.

Where once he could be relied on for cuddly pop with reggae or house embellishments, he is now a seventies glam chick. Backed by a hallucinatory array of musicians (guitarists with foot-long quiffs, a large lady vocalist in a bosom-hoisting gown, et al) and some loud, distorted rock, George was Bowie, Mud and Pan's People in one.

An opening burst consisting of the album track Fine Time and Nancy Sinatra's These Boots Are Made For Walkin' was strange, heavy, congested — like the Glitter Band with a decent singer. But Satan's Butterfly Ball, dedicated to Leigh Bowery, was more uplifting than its name suggests.

He reverted to his early pop-tastic sound on the old hits Do You Really Want To Hurt Me? and Everything I Own, but Karma Chameleon was rendered a heavy metal rock-out. The gall. Best of all was the new Unfinished Business. This acoustic-guitared ballad elegises his alleged relationship with a straight rock singer, and proceded prettily until George impishly confided, "He's gonna serve me with some papers." Boys will, even now, be Boys.

The mask that fits

THEATRE
Michael Billington

ALTHOUGH attempts have recently been made to out John Osborne, the fact is that his early plays are saturated with references to homosexuality. And that process reached fulfilment in 1965 with **A Patriot For Me** now majestically revived by Peter Gill at the London Barbican. The production runs four hours, has 42 actors playing 84 roles and traverses the Austro-Hungarian Empire from 1890 to 1913; and I found it enthralling.

Osborne's heroes are all outsiders; and in Alfred Redl, a low-born, homosexual son of a Galician Jew who rose to the upper ranks of the snobbish, anti-Semitic Austrian army, he chose a classic example. Osborne's Redl is equally out of place among his whoring fellow-officers and the drag-queens at the annual costume-ball. Living a life that is a permanent lie, he is blackmailed into spying for the Russians and that, Osborne suggests, is both his natural fulfilment and his tragic destiny.

But it is not a play that offers a simplistic message. It implies that in a hypocritical society, such as Austria or indeed Britain in a state of historical decline, the individual is forced to adopt a convenient mask.

But the play is neither for Redl nor against him: it is really about a society that tells lies to itself and about the consequent self-deception of the individual. So its emotional centrepiece is the beautifully staged drag-ball, in which a soprano turns out to be a man and the gaudily decked shepherdesses are all ramrod-backed Austrian army officers. It is a masquerade which epitomises the élitism and duality of a whole society.

It is a landmark play in its open treatment of homosexuality and in the breadth of its historical canvas. And Gill's production, ingeniously designed by Tom Piper to suggest dark, imperial grandeur, boasts a range of excellent supporting performances from Clive Wood as a Russian spymaster, Reginald Marsh as Redl's adoring patron and Denis Quilley as the Baron. Today it is fashionable to put Osborne down; but few post-war plays have dealt so brilliantly with the way the individual, in rejecting the ethos of his society, also uncannily reflects it.

Euripides's play **The Phoenician Women** at Stratford's Other Place, written late in his life, is both a fascinating variation on the Theban myth and a lament for the pointlessness of civil war. It is also a story of fratricidal strife involving the two sons of Oedipus.

Katie Mitchell's production is a logical follow-up to her Henry VI: another play about the needless destruction of civil war. She has the great gift of individualising the characters while animating the chorus. Lorraine Ashbourne's Jocasta is a stunning portrait both of a loving mother who fondles her son with incestuous passion and of a woman wracked at the prospect of the city's downfall.

The chorus is a living force rather than, as so often, an image of a hapless Women's Institute outing; and, even though some of them clutch suitcases, this simply reminds us they were en route to Delphi when the army arrived. Mitchell is back on top form with a production that pierces to the heart of the play.

The importance of being Fitz

TELEVISION
Nancy Banks-Smith

IT MAY have escaped your notice that they are both called Fitz. This gives an added piquancy to the bruising collision of **Pride And Prejudice** (BBC1) and **Cracker** (Granada) on Sunday nights.

Mr Darcy (Colin Firth) is called Fitzwilliam. Not that anyone actually dares to call him Fitz, though you wouldn't put it past Lizzie Bennet. He is much given to galloping about on a white horse or duelling or diving fully clothed into his lake. Anything which involves wrenching off his cravat and unbuttoning his shirt. He is horribly in love which accounts for the cold baths.

Darcy hasn't a word to throw at a dog. He strode down his stately hall with two cheerful dogs gambolling around him without throwing a word at either. There is something of the faithful hound ("Fitz, fetch!") about him. He stares at Elizabeth like a ravenous mastiff that has been put on its honour not to touch that sausage. In the last episode, seeing her in tears, he actually gnawed his knuckles.

He is strong, silent, upright and uptight. As Cleggy said in Last Of The Summer Wine: "No one could live in trousers like that without the tension finally getting to them." Pride And Prejudice is now into ejaculation time, grammatically speaking that is. Lathered horses arrive at midnight with letters (a postal service which can only leave you sighing) to say that Lydia has eloped with a soldier with side whiskers. Great God! I knew it! Disgrace! Debauch! Seduction!

Fear not. Fitz has gone to London to fetch. Good boy.

You would be looking at Fitz in Cracker for some time before the words catatonic toff occurred to you. Chatty fatty maybe. Words are his expertise.

You could say of Jimmy McGovern, the writer, as Fitz said of Detective Sergeant Beck, a rapist: "You find sex a fascinating subject, don't you, Jimmy?" Well, it so happens that you can only write with vigour about things which fascinate you. Which is why Jane Austen refused a royal request to write a history of the House of Hanover and why Jimmy McGovern doesn't write about young ladies flower-arranging.

The rapes in this Cracker are even worse than those in the last series (and would once have been thought highly unsuitable for a Sunday) but they are written with shocking power. Even the jokes — and the jokes are very good — have the jolt of electricity.

Two prostitutes are raped and murdered in the first part of Brotherly Love, a three-part story. The punter's requirements are precise and paedophile: "Shirley Temple without a condom." That is, he wants the woman to sing a childish song and look innocently knowing.

When Graham Greene wrote that Shirley Temple's performance, her coquetry and her well-shaped and desirable little body might have a salacious effect on the middle-aged men in her audience, the libel bankrupted his magazine Night And Day. In fact Shirley Temple had first attracted notice when she was three with her impersonation of Marlene Dietrich and later she wrote in her memoirs that studio executives had often tried to molest her. All libels are probably true. Eventually.

A tricky thing about TV criticism is that you are writing before breakfast about programmes only fit to be seen after dinner. The deaths are disgusting and the second murder, with a bleeding girl crawling, falling, down vertiginous stone stairs, would have impressed Hitchcock. Whoever did this stunt was not credited but deserved to be.

The second murder occurs while the suspect for the first is in custody. So perhaps Brotherly Love means that his brother has committed an identical murder to save him. The brother is a priest.

All have done well and all shall have prizes, as Lewis Carroll said. Cracker has already won about 20 awards and will win more. But it is Robbie Coltrane as Fitz who, like the Flying Scotsman, pulls the other carriages along at such a rattling pace that, when he refused to do another series, there was no question of replacing him.

Comedians are formidable creatures and often make excellent criminals. Twice in this episode Fitz is accused of being a rapist at heart himself. "Why didn't you just rape her physically?" as the priest said after Fitz had reduced the suspect's wife to heartbroken tears. Considering how brutally Cracker ejected London's Burning from its regular Sunday night seat, one of the lines hit home hard. The suspect said he had an alibi. He was watching London's Burning. "Let it burn, I say," said Fitz.

Ireland in revolt

OPERA
Tom Sutcliffe

LUIGI FERRARI'S first Wexford season as artistic director has transformed the little Irish opera festival from a somewhat patronised West British eccentricity into a European artistic event. Wexford 1995 is in a different class artistically from all previous years because Ferrari, who is also director of the Pesaro Rossini festival in Italy is the first non-Brit to take charge here, and he simply has different expectations and attitudes.

There has always in the past been a bit of a cultural cringe about Wexford, a hangover from bad old deference to Anglo-Irishness. It craved allowance for the fact that it was a decaying, lethargic fishing-port: standards were diluted in drafts of Guinness and goodwill.

Ferrari, a charming, bespectacled, slightly owlish 44-year-old is probably ignorant of the political and social history, and a good thing too. He can avoid that minefield, and assume that everybody is serious about the business: opera, singing, music, theatrical performance.

So the chorus has at a stroke been turned totally professional, more than half of it procured from the Prague Chamber Choir. The orchestra pit has been slightly extended. The orchestra is larger, and the National Symphony has never sounded more scrupulously prepared by its conductors. Ferrari has expanded the rehearsal period from three to four weeks. Albert Rosen (a slightly unrefined Czech maestro long part of the Irish scene) is out, and three conductors represented by Mrs Pavarotti's Bologna agency Stage Door are in — all proving exceptionally able. It is nothing less than a *revoluzione*.

Michie Nakamura in the title role of Iris PHOTO: AMELIA STEIN

Both the Rossini **Petite Messe Solenelle** at the Church of Ireland's St Birinius and the Moscow State Theatre Helikon's pocket version of **Pique Dame** at White's Barn were uncompromisingly excellent.

For the Petite Messe, Mariana Pentchéva was a revelation of vocal colour, technical assurance and musical emotion. She has a world-class voice, astonishingly rich at the bottom, able to accomplish octave leaps into its middle register with no hint of gear change. In this performance with two pianos and harmonium wonderfully nuanced by Maestro Roberto Polastri, the other soloists were also thrilling — Aled Hall, a Welsh tenor with pure Italianate vowels and two highly promising new Italians, soprano Gemma Bertagnolli and profound bass Davide Baronchelli.

The pocket **Queen Of Spades**, abridged to 90 minutes, was not for a beginner. Anybody in the audience unfamiliar with the Pushkin story had only the energy of the singing (in Russian) and intense acting to carry them through Tchaikovsky's study in obsession.

Using a huge magic mirror and a card table, and accompanied splashily by Ljouba Orfenova on the piano, the main characters made their mark and played their cards. At the centre of the plot, Sergei Yakovlev created a blond Hermann totally off the wall. Elena Guschina was a countess without the usual "old age" effects, sexually compelling, vocally striking. Andrei Baturkin did Tomsky's introductory narrative finely. Anatoly Lochak, who last year took the title role here in The Demon, sang Yeletsky's aria with ravishing nobility. And the 31-year-old Marina Mescheriakova, as Lisa, showed off the astonishingly assured and powerful singing with which she won the Belvedere Competition in Vienna this year.

Ferrari's hugely exciting change of pace and purpose is a logical development from the big strides the festival made during the 13 years when it was run by Elaine Padmore, now boss of the Danish Royal Opera. Padmore professionalised the stagings, inviting all sorts of young directorial talents, and opened a channel of superbly-trained Russian voices when she introduced Sergei Leiferkus in 1982.

And the Russians at Wexford continue completely to upstage Italians and everybody else vocally. This partly explains why Rimsky-Korsakov's **Mayskaya noch'** (May Night) was the best of the three full-scale festival operas this year.

The most remarkable new voice of the entire festival was the 27-year-old Russian tenor Vsevelod Grivnov who sang the lover Levko. He has done very little opera and got the part as a last chance candidate when Ferrari, auditioning in Moscow, was almost on his way to the airport. With a robust technique and model enunciation of the text, his musical instincts and projection are infallible and he played this romantic juvenile lead completely naturally. The duets with Irina Dolzhenko's delicious Hanna were lovely.

The comics, in a broad Russian Carry on style, were irresistible: Vladimir Malorin's man-mountain Headman, Frances McCafferty as his substantial sister-in-law, and Wjascheslav Weinorowski as the property-developing distiller. The only problem was the lack of surtitles for such rich comedy.

The 23-year-old conductor Vladimir Jurowski brought enormous energy, and idiomatic precision to the dramatic and orchestral realisation — an amazingly accomplished technician for Rimsky's descriptive detail. And Stephen Medcalf's staging in a simple wooden plank setting by Francis O'Connor managed transitions from peasant life to fairytale with high efficiency.

PACINI, a minor contemporary of Donizetti with slight melodic and dramatic gifts, but a pleasing lyrical instinct, wrote **Saffo**.

The simple staging of this production by veteran designer Beni Montresor was a trip back to the Scala circa 1954 — dignified flowing white or silver and gold robes, and ladies-in-waiting in little cloth tiaras. Highly stylised and dusty acting never made the drama believable. But some of the music (a sentimental clarinet solo before the final scene) was fetching and Mariana Pentcheva as the ripe mezzo Climene was thrilling.

Iris was a tale of sullied Japanese innocence, staged with an overacted winsomeness and tiresomely self-conscious theatricality by Lorenzo Mariani. It was really absurd tosh that needed lovely singing. Michie Nakamaru in the title role was stridently oppressive and white-toned in her dramatic upper register — though her quiet phrases were good and she made a touching victim. But Ludovit Ludha as the seducer Osaka (a Caruso role) had an attractive tenor and Richard Robson as Iris's blind father had the sweetest voice.

Iris takes the whole of the last act to die (by throwing herself through a window. Atmospheric petals and leaves fell from the flies: Iris finally succumbed to an avalanche of maxi-confetti while the offstage heavenly chorus crowded up the steps of the gallery. The effects left me dry-eyed.

The centre that held too tightly

Hugo Young

Accountable to None
by Simon Jenkins
Hamish Hamilton 320pp £16.99

THERE are few aspects of Margaret Thatcher's record which she is unwilling to defend. She's the least embarrassable politician of them all. But one feature of her time, the pervasive tendency to centralise public power, provoked at least some glancing regrets in her memoirs. She put it down as an unintended consequence of her otherwise benign revolution. In this elegant philippic, Simon Jenkins shows how the nationalisation of Britain became the essence of Thatcherism.

This is an important book, because it brings together, with an insider's authority and anecdotage, both a narrative of domestic Thatcherism and a polemic against its pretensions. The individual stories, from the poll tax to police reforms, may be familiar in outline, but Jenkins's assemblage of factual detail and pertinent scepticism makes a lethal dossier. In today's faction-ridden Tory party, it's one to which neither side can offer a convincing rebuttal or, it seems, an answer. Under Major, as Jenkins shows in an expert chapter, the bogusness and non-accountability of so-called privatising has taken another leap forward, on the railways.

The indictment proceeds on two tracks. First is the sheer accumulation of power, mainly through budgetary control, at the centre. The poll tax cost £1.5 billion to introduce and then abolish, but when it ended, the vast reduction in the proportion of revenue which local authorities controlled — from 60 per cent to 18 per cent — wasn't reversed. The local share went on getting smaller. The national curriculum, whatever else it may be, is a massive invasion of political directives into the classroom.

The other track says that power, local or central, has become unaccountable. Urban renewal was pushed in parallel with the destruction of the local democracy that used to have a say in shaping it. Universities have lost both independence and the right of appeal to anyone except the Secretary of State. The words of Thatcherite ministers achieved what Jenkins calls "Orwellian dysfunction", with mega-centraliser Kenneth Baker, like poll-tax functionary Nicholas Ridley, committing themselves to the sincere belief that they were enhancing local democracy.

But this telling critique is only one half of a case, as the author acknowledges. How centralism is to be reversed is another matter, particularly as the Labour party has committed itself to such a principle. Apart from its special pledges to devolve power to Scotland, how can we know Labour has either the real will to do this, or the slightest idea how to set about it?

There's a prior question. Mrs Thatcher did not invent centralisation. The British have acquiesced in the trend for decades. Is there such a thing as a sense of locality, sufficient to sustain the kind of de-centralised services Jenkins implicitly favours?

This is partly a matter of Britain's size: not big enough to federate fully, but not small enough to be run well from a single centre. There's another book to be written, addressing the question of exactly how a country of Britain's, especially England's, particular size and history remakes itself into a tapestry of localities.

Giving up the gauche

Francis Wyndham

Terence Rattigan: A Biography
by Geoffrey Wansell
Fourth Estate 434pp £20

TERENCE RATTIGAN was 25 when his play French Without Tears had a phenomenal, unexpected but deserved success. It affectionately mocked those English characteristics that an English audience loves to see mocked: tactlessness, embarrassment, boyish boisterousness, stylish understatement. Rattigan's celebrity was therefore, from the start, associated with the spirit of youth and such words as "froth", "gossamer" and "champagne".

A lover of luxury with liberal principles, he must have prophetically sensed danger for his next play. After The Dance, which was a bitter study of flippant "bright young things" of the 1920s coming to grief in the earnest 1930s. It was well received but, opening on the eve of war in 1939, it did not run. Rattigan saw it as a commercial flop and resolutely omitted it from his Collected Plays. Revived a few years ago, it proved to be one of his more effective pieces — but for him it remained a failure, and he was allergic to failure.

So when, after 10 more plays and 17 years of sustained success, he suddenly went out of fashion in 1956, the shock was cataclysmic — and Geoffrey Wansell's otherwise disappointing biography does convey the magnitude of Rattigan's pain. For the new theatrical generation his name was a dirty word, along with "french windows" and "well-made play".

He still made a lot of money — was indeed, like Noël Coward, a tax exile — but was perceived as the antithesis of a serious playwright. This was profoundly unfair: some of those plays now seem shallow and


Rattigan: allergic to failure

snobbish but several (in particular, The Browning Version and The Deep Blue Sea) have survived as powerful expressions of his major themes: humiliation and obsession.

There now seems to have been a veiled homophobia behind the assault on his work by such critics as Kenneth Tynan and Penelope Gilliatt, when they accused him of hypocrisy in shirking his homosexuality. Yet though Rattigan's reticence may have been politic, it was not artistically dishonest. Even if the Strindbergian married couple in The Browning Version and the Phèdre-like heroine of The Deep Blue Sea were conceived by a gay sensibility, they ring triumphantly true in a heterosexual context. In the plays that followed, all inferior to his best, he did occasionally confront homosexual themes (in, for example, Ross and Man And Boy) but something self-conscious in his approach only created a new sense of falsity. He died in 1977, aged 66, before a just re-appraisal of his talent had begun.

Rattigan's story was itself a drama, perhaps a tragedy. This book is diligently researched but depressingly pedestrian. It plods its way through its subject's professional and personal lives in commendable detail but without conveying atmosphere. The lovers who meant most to him (Kenneth Morgan, whose suicide inspired The Deep Blue Sea, and Michael Franklin, known as "the Midget") remain almost as shadowy as the army of anonymous pick-ups.

Muscle without tension

Laura Cumming

Bloodstained Kings
by Tim Willocks
Cape 311pp £14.99

TIM WILLOCKS'S third novel begins and ends with a flash of lightning "that floods the midnight campo with incandescent witness". A helpful frame for Hollywood, which presumably already has the rights, but a trivial effect for a novelist as hyperbolic as Willocks. His prose is always attempting to burst free from the constraints of the English dictionary — note that "campo" — just as his characters are always engaged in strenuous civil war with themselves. This novel features a hero initially paralysed by "psychotic melancholia", a villain whose Luciferian despair is couched in Old Testament idiom and a millionairess so burdened with hatred that she has kept her husband caged and sedated for over 13 years. Add to this a more or less constant blaze of guns and ammo crossfire, and lightning just looks like incidental weather.

Willocks likes a manly plot. His last book, the international bestseller Green River Rising, combined a lurid tale of prison riots with a Dirty Dozen-style outing. The point of intersection was a damsel in distress "with a full, muscular ass and a one-and-a-half inch gap between the top of her thighs". Now, with seasonal adjustment, there are two women in need of protection: a leggy black singer called Ella and her long-lost mother Lenna Parillaud, the blonde millionairess so busily torturing her husband. Before you raise an eyebrow, we are in Louisiana. The Klannish husband — not for nothing called Faroe — had tried to have his wife's baby murdered. But Ella survived and when Faroe predictably escapes, he targets wife and child.

Enter GQ man. Comfortably over six feet, weighing 195 and able to "bench press two-twenty" at his prime, Cicero Grimes is good with women, dogs and vintage Electra Glides. He's also a professional, a doctor turned psychiatrist like his author. Roused from his melancholy by the challenge to find two suitcases containing enough evidence to incriminate Louisiana's élite, Grimes embarks on a blowy trail that naturally leads to Faroe. He's just the man for the job.

For a thriller writer, Willocks is curiously uninterested in suspense. He is forever providing handy guns and getaway planes in advance of extremity, and although his gory shoot-outs are excellently written, he loses the tension between them. The narrative switches between brutal hyperbole — "Dealing with the Captain is like fucking a rattlesnake with Aids without a condom" — and a kind of metaphysical swooning: "The psychobiological torment of ages was metamorphosed into a gaping breach between the one which was one and the other which was all sensate things." That's an attempt to enter the consciousness of a dying man. You could never call Willocks unambitious.

This man, the Luciferian Jefferson, does not in fact die. Indeed he makes several false exits. He survives untreated gangrene, fatal stabbing and infernal flames because he's not so much man as multi-purpose symbol. This means he gets some of the worst lines in the book: "Love . . . was an imbecile's gargling laughter at the joke he did not understand." "Justification . . . the vapid convalescent home of the civilised". But he gets to prove the novel's moral argument, which is that love can defeat evil. This is bathetically echoed in the book's real love affair, between Grimes and his partner in arms: a loyal German Shepherd.

The useful thing about this dog, apart from an ability to castrate the opposition with its teeth, is that it doesn't speak. Rather like the women. Lenna's pain is apparently too deep for articulation, Ella spends much of the novel listening to arguments for bombing the Japanese in the second world war and blowing away Faroe's gang. Even Grimes has to waive his introspection and his clinical interest in bullet wounds — "two puckered holes one inch above the right costal margin in the mid-clavicular line" — and get on with righting "the primal imbalance". Lucky he's such a man of action. After all, when it comes to defeating evil, love isn't always the surest shot.

Paperbacks

Nicholas Lezard

In Pharaoh's Army, by Tobias Wolff (Picador, £5.99)

THE continuation of his autobiography (after This Boy's Life), which sees the young Wolff off on a tour of duty in 'Nam. This is now hardly new memorial territory but Wolff's story is as much about what is going on in his head as what is going on in the paddy fields and villages of Vietnam: haunting, elegiac, and sparse.

The Penguin Book of Childhood, ed Michael Rosen (Penguin, £6.99)

"*CHILDREN* today love luxury too much. They have execrable manners, flaunt [sic] authority, have no respect for their elders . . . What kind of awful creatures will they be when they grow up?" No, not Paul Johnson: Socrates. An Italian observer, circa 1500: "The want of affection in the English is strongly manifested towards their children . . ." An erratic, poignant, and eye-opening anthology: rather like childhood itself, in fact.

Looking at Giacometti, by David Sylvester (Pimlico, £12.50)

SYLVESTER'S long connection with Giacometti has given him both an ease with, and an insight into the creative process which other art critics would do well to emulate, in an age when most art criticism is what Empson once called "an iron-hard jet of absolutely total nonsense". An exegesis and a biography at once, this is as indispensable as art books get; lavishly and thoughtfully illustrated, too.

Bones and Murder, by Margaret Atwood (Virago, £5.99)

TAKEN in small sips, amusing and far less stodgy than her novels, although the Fay Weldonesque tone can become tiring. This is good (from Women's Novels): "I like to read novels in which the heroine has a costume rustling discreetly over her breasts, or discreet breasts rustling under her costume; in any case there must be a costume, some breasts, some rustling, and, over all, discretion."

Peace and Its Discontents, by Edward W Said, foreword by Christopher Hitchens (Vintage, £6.99)

DIDN'T we all feel a little lump in the throat when we saw Arafat and Rabin shaking hands? Well, says Said, we shouldn't have. This new collection of Said's pieces patiently, and with great clarity, points out all that has gone wrong with the peace process. His contumely is basically tripartite: for the US administration's pusillanimity and glibness, Arafat's desperate weakness, and Rabin's psychosis. He is as disgusted as anyone by Hamas, but at least after reading this you will know where they're coming from, and why.

Created and chilled by war

Natasha Walter

Vera Brittain: A Life
by Paul Berry and Mark Bostridge
Chatto 581pp £25

IN 1978, 45 years after its first publication, a new generation fell in love with Vera Brittain's one great work, Testament Of Youth. Reissued by Virago and re-animated as a BBC serial, it found a flock of new readers ready to swoon at the detailed tragedy of Brittain's young life. Deservedly so. Testament Of Youth has the rhythm and inexorability of fiction; who could believe in a heroine so bright and charming, who fell in love in the summer of 1914, only to endure the deaths of her brother, her fiancé and their two best friends — blasted away in the trenches? It is the testament of the lost generation, and it is also a testament of a woman coming into self-knowledge through the experience of nursing prisoners, recording bombs and blackouts, diseases and dirt. It was this talent for intimate realism that Virginia Woolf admired: "I am reading with extreme greed a book by Vera Brittain," she wrote. "Her story, told in detail, without reserve, of the war, and how she lost lover and brother, and dabbled her hands in entrails, and was forever seeing the dead, and eating scraps, and sitting five on one WC, runs rapidly, vividly across my eyes."

Brittain never recaptured that spark of vernacular life. In her other 28 books, her prose solidified into platitude. Her other autobiographies are ridden with cliché, while her novels display the faults of a memoirist — excessive self-interest and inability to imagine strange minds or situations — with the faults of a moralist.

Paul Berry and Mark Bostridge, do not provide much literary judgment, which is perhaps just as well. They are honest, precise and smart in the way they flesh out the record. They give Brittain her due as a political animal driven by pacifism and feminism. They show us her extreme dedication to her chosen art; she kept her nose to Grub Street not out of penury but out of ambition and idealism. They give her to us physically, her fragile prettiness that matured into self-conscious elegance. And they give her to us emotionally, as an over-sensitive woman whose relationships were constantly thwarted, by death, by war, by lack of desire.

To Brittain's own record of her early years, they add some counterpoint. The most poignant addition had always been a possibility: her brother's homosexuality and the cloud that cast over his life and death. Many readers will have noted a comment in one of his letters to Brittain, quoted in Testament Of Youth: "Women are a great problem to me. I meet very few, of those I dislike almost all, and I don't think I understand any of them." And in one of Brittain's outrageously autobiographical novels, Honourable Estate, the beautiful young heroine, working as a nurse in France, like Vera, hears, like Vera, that her brother has been shot through the head. The fictional revelation that the brother shot himself to avoid the bursting of a homosexual scandal has always been suggestive of something similar in Edward's life.

Vera Brittain: her feminism was pursued with moral certainty

Berry and Bostridge have unearthed the truth. A homosexual scandal was indeed about to burst. If it hadn't been for the sniper's bullet, Edward Brittain would have faced an inquiry and probably a court martial. Vera found this out only many years later, and the idea that he might have courted death in order to avoid the scandal resonated horribly with her. Similarly, her fiancé, Roland Leighton, never told her about his conversion to Catholicism shortly before his death, which made her feel miserably cut out.

After Testament Of Youth Brittain never recaptured that spark of vernacular life

In a funny way the war, despite or because of its unrelenting tragedy, created Vera Brittain. It created her as a writer — she was still struggling as a freelance journalist and little-known novelist when Testament Of Youth crystallised the mood of a generation. And it created her as a pacifist. After the first world war, she moved gradually from the League of Nations and collective security to the Peace Pledge Union and absolute pacifism, and never gave up.

Her feminism was similarly pursued with absolute moral certainty, in her writing and in her life. But although we might share her goals of pacifism and feminism, there can be something smug about Vera Brittain. Her feminism is narrowly middle-class. And her pacifism is high-handed in its treatment of moral issues; she accused women who restrict their interest to domestic affairs of being "guilty of gross irresponsible selfishness"; she accused governments of "committing the sin against the Holy Ghost", and sprinkled her work with quotations from Confucius and Christ. This impersonal, pious streak went deep; she was capable of breaking off close friendships over intellectual disagreements; one acquaintance who met her at Oxford described her as "humourless and very political".

Indeed, her personal life, after that first flush of rapture, seems curiously downbeat. Perhaps it was not hugely enriched by her husband, George Catlin, who pursued her after reading her first autobiographical novel. "Much as I love my husband, I would not sacrifice one successful article to a night of physical relationship," she once wrote. Though her daughter, Shirley Williams, fulfilled many of her long-standing dreams by going into politics, the relationship that really buoyed Brittain up after the war's holocaust of love, was her close bond with Winifred Holtby.

Holtby, who never married, lived with Brittain for 16 years, even after the latter was married, and imputations of lesbianism flew about. Berry and Bostridge do their best to refute them, and no doubt they are right. Not just because both women denied it, but also because one can't help feeling that if a mutual love had ever animated Vera Brittain again, it would have ignited her work as her love for Roland and her brother did. But the war took too much from Vera Brittain, and though she may have found, as Roland Leighton predicted for her in one bittersweet poem, that "daisies are truer than passion-flowers"; it does not seem, from this biography, that she could ever be satisfied with what she found.

Apathy in the dock

Sousa Jamba

Declares Pereira
by Antonio Tabucchi
Translated by Patrick Creagh
The Harvill Press 135pp £9.99

THE ITALIAN novelist Antonio Tabucchi is a Lusophile. He has promoted Portuguese literature in his native country by, among other things, translating Fernando Pessoa (despite his death in 1935, the leading Portuguese writer of this century), into Italian. Tabucchi's love for the Portuguese language is so deep that he wrote Requiem — the highly acclaimed novella which conjures different facets and characters of Lisbon — in it. Understandably, this act has endeared Tabucchi to many Portuguese who have never read a single word of his.

Declares Pereira is a novella set again in Tabucchi's beloved Lisbon. This time it is the late thirties and the dictatorship of Antonio Salazar, who was to dominate Portuguese life for the next 50 years, is in full swing. This is a country where neighbours inform on each other to the omnipresent secret police and the state keeps churning out vapid propaganda.

Dr Pereira, the protagonist of Tabucchi's latest novel, is a portly former crime reporter who runs the culture page of Lisboa, a newspaper censored by the authorities. He is obsessed with death, hence his fondness for obituaries. He takes the photograph of his dead wife wherever he goes and talks to it often. In many ways, Dr Pereira works as a metaphor for Portugal and its empire under Dr Salazar — lethargic and inward-looking. As many Africans would appreciate who also lived under Dr Salazar's rule — in Angola, Mozambique, Guinea Bissau, the Cape Verde Islands and São Tomé — Dr Pereira is also typical of the biddable functionaries of an oppressive regime. He has learnt to plod along carefully in order not to draw attention to himself.

Wanting to take on an assistant for the culture page, Dr Pereira settles for Monteiro Rossi, a young man of Italian extraction who has just written a thesis on death.

Rossi churns out obituaries of literary figures he admires — such as Lorca. Dr Pereira, mindful that they would only infuriate the censors, keeps the pieces on file. He does, however, pay Rossi for his contributions. Eager not to offend the authorities, Dr Pereira keeps publishing French short stories, which incur the wrath of his editor-in-chief, who insists he should publish the works of Portuguese writers. Meanwhile, Rossi, apart from writing unpublishable obituaries, involves himself and his revolutionary girlfriend, Marta, in secret networks trying to overthrow the regime.

Soon, however, Rossi becomes a fugitive from the regime and hides in Dr Pereira's flat. The secret police track him down and beat him to death.

Here, Dr Pereira, the usually diffident editor, decides to strike a blow at the regime by outwitting the censors and publishing an article recounting the death of Rossi at the hands of its agents. Mindful of the consequences of his action, Dr Pereira flees into exile.

Declares Pereira, which was a bestseller in Italy, is a vivid novella. Although, occasionally, it seems Tabucchi meant it to read like an official report, its lucidity brings Borges, and not some pompous bureaucrat, to mind.

Chess Leonard Barden

IT WAS Kasparov-fear that did it. In the critical phase of the Intel world championship Vishy Anand plunged from 5-4 up to 5½-8½ down, after which the demoralised challenger could only halve out to defeat. It was eerily reminiscent of Bobby Fischer's matches in 1971-72, and brought to mind Jon Speelman's comment that playing Kasparov is like a bombardment by thought waves.

Next stop for Kasparov is to reunite the Fide and PCA world titles, where he will meet the winner of Karpov-Kamsky. It should be harder for him than against Short or Anand, for Karpov at 44 is still a tough campaigner while Kamsky, still only 21, is capable of putting down a marker for a more serious challenge a few years hence.

Garry Kasparov-Vishy Anand, 14th game

1 e4 d5!? The ultimate opening surprise, never played before by Anand or in a world championship, and which Kasparov had only met in simultaneous and offhand games.

2 cxd5 Qxd5 3 Nc3 Qa5 4 d4 Nf6 5 Nf3 c6 6 Ne5 Be6 7 Bd3 Nbd7 8 f4?! Kasparov later said he wished he hadn't played this move, blaming it on his unfamiliarity with the opening. Anand now has a clear long-term plan, to control and occupy e4. Better choices are 8 Qe2 or 8 Bf4.

g6 9 0-0 Bg7 10 Kh1 Bf5 11 Bc4 e6 12 Be2 Threatening 13 g4, but this is easily stopped and Black's B stands well on f5 despite the surrounding light-squared pawns. **h5 13 Be3 Rd8 14 Bg1 0-0 15 Bf3 Nd5?!** Even stronger is c5!

16 Nxd5 Here Kasparov offered a draw, just to see how long Anand took to refuse.

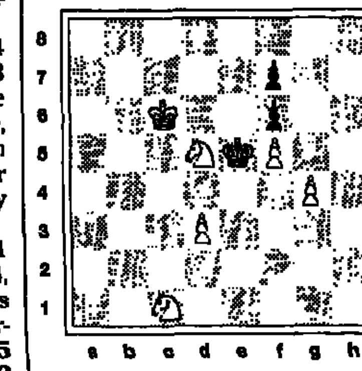
exd5 17 Bf2 Qc7 18 Rc1 f6 19 Nd3 Rfe8 20 b3 Nb6 En route to e4. **21 a4 Nc8 22 c4 Qf7 23 a5 Bf8 24 cxd5 cxd5 25 Bh4 Nd6 26 a6!** A nudging advance with a hidden point. **b6 27 Ne5!?** Muddying the waters just as Anand is ready for Ne4.

Qe6? Later Kasparov showed 27. . . fxe5 28 fxe5 Ne4 29 Bxd8 Rxd8 30 g4 hxg4 31 Bxg4 Bxg4 32 Qxg4 Nf2+ 33 Rxf2 Qxf2 34 Qxg6+ Bg7 35 Rc7 Qf1+ 36 Qg1. If Black now tries to win by Qxg1+ (Qf3-d1+ is a draw) 37 Kxg1 Bh6 38 Kf2 Rf8+ 39 Ke2 Rf7 40 Rb7! at least draws — an idea made possible by 26 a6!

28 g4! This strong move, coupled with the only time scramble of the match, excited the spectators whose cheering made K and A realise that their booth was not soundproof after all.

hxg4 29 Nxg4 Bg7? Better Be7. **30 Rc7 Ne4 31 Ne3 Bh3** If Qd6 32 Rxg7+ Kxg7 33 Nxf5+ with a strong attack. **32 Rg1 g5 33 Bg4 Bxg4 34 Qxg4 Qxg4 35 Rxg4 Nd6 36 Bf2 Nb5 37 Rb7 Re4 38 f5! Rxg4?** A final time pressure error, paralysing his own bishop. Rxd4 is a better chance. **39 Nxg4 Rc8 40 Rd7 Rc2 41 Rxd5 Resigns.** If Nc7 42 Rd8+ Kf7 43 Rd7+ Kg8 44 d5 Nxa6 45 Rxa7 and the d pawn will soon cost Black a piece.

No 2394



White mates in 11 moves, against any defence (by M McDowell, British Chess Magazine 1995). An 11-mover sounds a turn-off, but this is actually a clever test of your knight skills. If White can manoeuvre his c1 knight to f3 it's checkmate, while the BK can only oscillate between e5 and d4 as long as White's touring knight guards the d3 pawn at critical moments.

No 2393: 1 Re3. If Kxe3 2 Qd2, or g3 2 Re4, or Nxg5 2 Qe5.

Melvyn's lucky break

Colin Luckhurst

MELVYN, for three years our stud ram here at The Droppings, probably does not know to this day how lucky he was when flock management decisions were taken earlier this year. Unless you sell all ewe lambs each year and breed from an ageing flock of ewes you need to change the ram — otherwise he will be tupping his own daughters in November.

Agriculturalists refer to what humans call incest as line breeding. We try to avoid it even though we have not always succeeded. So, if you keep the flock young by retaining some ewe lambs from the spring crop you need an occasional change of ram. That was Melvyn's problem, for we needed to change him despite his successful record as impregnator of our flock of Herdwicks and begetter of a goodly number of ewe lambs — the shepherd's ideal.

I was close to taking him to market in the spring — where he would very likely have ended at fairly short notice as the contents of several gross tins of cat food.

But, out of the blue, we had an offer, not a generous one but acceptable nevertheless, for Melvyn, some ewes and their lambs at foot, from a Dartmoor resident who was looking for a starter flock of Herdwicks.

We could see our way clear to assist on this, and Melvyn and flock went off down the M5 without a backward glance to start a new life in Devon. Melvyn is probably bracing himself for a busy season even now.

So we needed to replace him since I recently had the remaining ram lambs butchered for the freezer. And it was with this in mind that we set off for Salisbury to the autumn sale of the Hampshire branch of the Rare Breeds Survival Trust.

Herdwicks are not actually a scheduled rare breed. They are native to Lakeland, hardy, and although uncommon in the south of England, not a threatened breed. They look essentially amiable as they resemble Old English sheep dogs. We have had, over the years, some of the rare categories, notably Castlemilk Mourits and Whitefaced Woodlands. The latter are splendid big sheep, do lovely lambs, but can jump a 4ft fence from a standing start without visibly breaking sweat.

ILLUSTRATION: GEOFF JONES

THERE were a small number of Herdwicks to be auctioned after the main sale, so we hoped to secure a strong young ram. And, after a four-hour wait and a modest expenditure, that is what we achieved. Saul, the ram lamb we inspected and decided to bid for, was lot 198 and eventually passed through the ring at 2pm.

Auctioneers always intrigue me. Custom requires a florid countenance and a combination of houndstooth check and cavalry twill topped by a soft brown trilby.

This man was unusual — he was quieter in all respects. Perhaps a low commercial market told him that attempting to hype up the fun farming market of the rare breeds specialists was unlikely to be worthwhile. Prices were quite low and some good-looking stock sold at modest prices in the sheep categories.

How pigs, cattle, and the biggest section, ducks and fowl, did, I cannot say. But large sums of money, in wads of the folding kind, were changing hands in the sales office so there may have been a bull market for some beasts even if it was not the sheep.

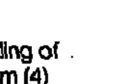
Saul is a polled Herdwick — he has no horns. This makes him as much use in any aggressive contest as a one-legged man at an arse kicking contest since rams compete by head to head nutting and horns are the lead weapon.

But he will face no competition for the favours of the flock.

Quick crossword no. 286

Across

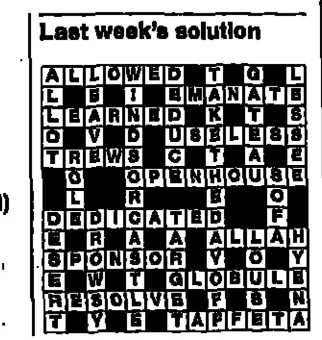
1 Dowdy, unattractive (8)
5 Sweetheart (4)
9 Once more (5)
10 Civil airfield (7)
11 Selling technique (12)
13 Day nursery (6)
14 Disregard (6)
17 Aggressiveness (12)
20 Run away (7)
21 Musty — lacking in originality (5)
22 Challenge (4)
23 The Western Isles (8)

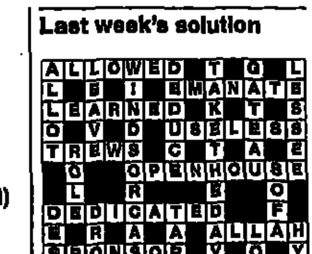


Down

1 Feeling of alarm (4)
2 Unconscious — ignorant (7)
3 Furniture van (12)
4 Unpleasantly suave (6)
6 Era (5)
7 Not drawn upon (8)
8 Sinner (12)
12 Sheath for sword (8)
15 Area of fruit trees (7)
16 Interfere (6)
18 Defeated competitor (5)
19 Not so much (4)

Last week's solution





Bridge Zia Mahmood

I RECEIVED a letter recently from a correspondent in France, Mr Gordon Sheere, who said that he always read the bridge column in the Guardian Weekly. This was remarkable, since it appeared that Mr Sheere did not play bridge, and had no real understanding of what the column was about. He asks whether there are books on the game which would enable him to play at his local club.

There are a great many books on bridge, at all levels, but not many which contain a genuinely new approach to its teaching. The main obstacle in learning the game is that you need three other players of a similar standard, plus a bridge teacher or a few books from which to obtain a knowledge of the game. You can't do much on your own.

But Danny Roth has written a series of books, published by Collins, which tackle this problem in a novel and practical way. The Expert Beginner, the first in the series, starts by enjoining the reader to get hold of a pack of cards and embark on a series of exercises which, in addition to introducing the basic concepts of

North
♠ A 6
♥ A K 2
♦ 8 4 2
♣ K J 10 8 6

West
♠ Q 10 4
♥ 7 6
♦ K Q J 7
♣ Q 9 5 2

East
♠ K J 9 5 2
♥ 5 4
♦ 10 9 6
♣ 7 4 3

South
♠ 8 7 3
♥ Q J 10 9 8 3
♦ A 5 3
♣ A

bridge, start to develop the skills needed to play the game to expert standard. The first exercise, for example, involves dealing out four hands, looking at three of them, and reconstructing the fourth without examining its cards.

Child's play, you may think, but a most effective learning tool since the race itself began. I sometimes wish that one or two of my rubber bridge partners, who have been playing the game for 20 years and more, were able to piece together an unseen hand in the way that Mr Roth's beginners are taught! Some of the material in The Expert Beginner is a lot closer to expert than beginner — but the logical presentation of ideas in the book ensures that the reader can cope. Look only at the North-South hands on the deal shown, and decide how you would make six hearts on the lead of the king of diamonds (see table left).

You have "on top" one spade, six hearts, a diamond and two clubs — 10 tricks. You could make an eleventh by trumping a spade in dummy, and perhaps a twelfth by establishing a long club. The trouble is, though, that as soon as you give up a spade, the enemy will cash a diamond and you will go down.

But try the following: win the ace of diamonds, cash the ace of clubs, play the queen of hearts and a heart to the king, cash the king of clubs throwing a diamond, and run the jack of clubs discarding South's last diamond. West wins with the queen of clubs, but dummy's 10, 8 of clubs are now established for South to discard his losing spades, and the contract is made with six heart tricks, four clubs and two aces.

Golf Volvo Masters

Montgomerie makes it three wins in a row

David Davies at Valderrama

SAM TORRANCE, head bowed and close to tears, walked off the course here knowing that he had given of his absolute best, and failed. In the final round of the Volvo Masters on Sunday he had produced the best round of the day by two shots and yet Colin Montgomerie, with a 72, had enough in reserve — one shot in fact — to win the Volvo Order of Merit for the third successive year. Torrance had failed, for the 25th successive year.

The struggle between the Scots almost overshadowed the victory by the Czech-born 24-year-old Alexander Cejka, whose third win of the season was by far the biggest.

He played with a ferocious intensity, marking his winning shot, an 11ft birdie putt, with several aerial uppercuts and a wild dance on the green. He had come home in a five-birdie 32, the best of the day by two, for a round of 70 and a total of 282 that, at two under, made him the only player to beat par.

He won £125,000, almost as much as the £157,114 he had earned in the 22 events he played this year.

Montgomerie was second, on level par, with David Gilford and Torrance jointly third on one over. Bernhard Langer, the only other player at the start of the tournament who could have won the Order, failed to exert any pressure.

Torrance was five shots behind Montgomerie after three rounds, and out 1hr 40min before him. It gave him a chance to make a statement, and with nine putts on the first nine holes to be out in a three-under 32 he did so. He came back in level par, thanks to a marvellous drive at the 415yd 18th, which left him only a 124yd wedge. He hit that to four feet and now Montgomerie knew what he had to do.

He heard the roar as Torrance holed that putt on the 18th as he walked down the 10th. "I knew he'd gone to plus-one and that I was plus-one at the time. I had to play the last nine holes in one under and I thought, 'Well, that's a 50-50 proposition'. But I'm a better player now than I was. I haven't dropped a shot on the back nine all week and I can make pars when I need to, I can miss greens on the correct side, that sort of thing."

Montgomerie got the birdie he needed at the 12th, with a five-iron to eight feet, and the par that won him the Order at the 17th. His second was a poor, pushed shot and it left him in the rough, two feet below the ball, with a side-hill stance. "I had 82 yards to the front of the green, and it went 82 yards," said Montgomerie. "The only reason it did not spin back into the water was because it was hit from the rough. But you need a bit of fortune at this game and I got mine there."



Torrance plays from the trees at the 9th PHOTOGRAPH: STEVE MUNDAY

Conditions at the long 17th, plus the fact that the pin was positioned only four yards on the green, meant that the well-struck shot, full of spin, such as the professionals love to hit, was extremely dangerous and likely to spin right off the green and into the lake.

There were 52 of Europe's finest on the course on Sunday and Miguel Angel Jimenez, who had an albatross two on the hole last year, took nine, with repeated visits to the water.

There were three eights and 10 sevens, which meant that over 25 per cent of one of the finest fields of the year could not get within two shots of the par.

"This Ballesteros," said Sandy Lyle of Seve, who designed the hole, "is he a professional golfer?"

Sports Diary Shiv Sharma

Easy for Liverpool

THE third round of the Coca-Cola Cup provided plenty of soccer action in midweek. Holders Liverpool marched on in style to the last 16 by brushing aside Manchester City 4-0, three of the goals coming in the last 15 minutes, including a first of the season for Ian Rush.

Liverpool took control of the game from the start and a ninth-minute goal by John Scales put them in the lead. So complete was their dominance that they could have been four ahead soon after. City's resolve stiffened when they found that the Anfield players were finding it almost too easy. However their resistance gave them more ball control but no goals.

Coventry City, whose form in the Premiership has plunged alarmingly, conjured up the old magic when they beat Tottenham 3-2. They produced a match that for excitement rivalled their FA Cup final success over the London club eight years before. Spurs went ahead after just two minutes through Chris Armstrong and an own goal by David Busst made it 2-0, but Coventry staged a spirited fightback. A Peter Ndlovu penalty, a Busst goal, this time in the right net, and the third from John Salako took Coventry into the fourth round.

Arsenal, playing in unrelenting rain and unbearably savage wind, kept their powder dry to beat Barnsley 3-0 to reach the last 16 in the competition. The conspiracy of the elements and the trecherous playing surface, seemed designed to encourage error but the Gunners overcame the odds after a difficult opening. Steve Bould got their first after 38 minutes, Dennis Bergkamp made it 2-0 four minutes later and Martin Keown put the argument beyond Barnsley on 76th minute.

Premiership leaders Newcastle overwhelmed Stoke 4-0, two of the goals coming from Peter Beardsley. QPR beat York 3-1 and Southampton defeated West Ham 2-1. Also through to the next round are Aston Villa, Blackburn, Leeds United, Sheffield Wednesday and Bury.

IN an attempt to make boxing safer, an independent medical panel published its report last week. Eighteen months in the making, it recommends a 12-point package, including compulsory annual brain scans, random weigh-ins and drug tests, a greater ringside role for doctors and a tightening of post-contest medical checks.

BOXER Scott Welch, fighting in his home town of Brighton, won the British and vacant Commonwealth heavyweight titles when he produced a powerful display to beat the British champion James Oyebola. The referee stopped the bout in the tenth round as Welch rained in blows on his opponent who had been knocked down for the second time moments earlier.

Ross Hale of Bristol made short work of retaining his British and Commonwealth title, beating Scotland's Charlie Kane with a second-round knockout.

Meanwhile, Billy Schwer retained his Commonwealth lightweight championship by stopping his South African challenger, Ditau Molefyane.

WISDEN Cricket Monthly paid substantial damages to Phillip DeFreitas, the Derbyshire and England cricketer, over an article that questioned the level of commitment of overseas players to the England team.

Pakistan's former Test captain, Salim Malik, arrived in Australia on Monday after his country's cricket board cleared him of bribery charges made against him by three Australian players. But the row simmered on as Australian cricket officials criticised the International Cricket Council for failing to investigate the matter.

BRITAIN'S Tim Henman produced the finest display of his tennis career to win the ATP Challenger event in Seoul. He beat Vincenzo Santopadre of Italy 6-2, 4-6, 6-4. The victory completed a notable double for Henman after his doubles triumph with Andrew Richardson.

AMERICAN tennis star Bobby Riggs, best remembered for his "Battle of the Sexes" match with Billie Jean King in 1973, has died, aged 77. Riggs lost that match, but in 1939 he was so confident of winning the singles title at his only Wimbledon appearance, that he bet £500 on his own victory and netted $100,000.

Football results

FA CARLING PREMIERSHIP
Aston Villa 1, Everton 0; Blackburn 3, Chelsea 0; Leeds 3, Coventry 1; Liverpool 6, Man C 0; Man Utd 2, Middlesbrough 0; QPR 1, Notts Forest 1; Sheff Wed 0, West Ham 1; Tottenham 1, Newcastle 1; Wimbledon 1, Southampton 2. **Leading positions:** 1, Newcastle (played 11, points 28); 2, Man U (11-26); 3, Liverpool (11-21).

ENDSLEIGH LEAGUE: First Division
Derby 2, Oldham 1; Grimsby 1, Stoke 0; Leicester 2, C Palace 3; Luton 0, Charlton 1; Millwall 2, West Brom 1; Norwich 1, Tranmere 1; Portsmouth 4, Watford 2; Port Vale 1, Birmingham 2; Reading 1, Ipswich 4; Southend 0, Huddersfield 0, Sunderland 2, Barnsley 1; Wolverhampton 1; Sheff Utd 0. **Leading positions:** 1, Millwall (14-28); 2, Birmingham (14-25); 3, Leicester (14-25).

Second Division: Blackpool 1, Oxford Utd 1, Bournemouth 2, Carlisle 0; Bradford City 2, Burnley 2; Brighton 2, Bristol Rvrs 0; Bristol C 0, Walsall 2; Crewe 3, Brentford 1; Notts Co 1, Swindon 3; Peterborough 6, York 1, Shrewsbury 3, Rotherham 1; Stockport 0, Chesterfield 1; Wrexham 1, Swansea 0; Wycombe 2, Hull 2. **Leading positions:** 1, Swindon (14-35); 2, Crewe (13-27); 3, Notts County (14-25).

Third Division: Cardiff 1, Colchester 2; Darlington 2, Plymouth 0; Doncaster 2, Preston 2; Exeter 1, Lincoln 1; Fulham 0, Hereford 0; Hartlepool 1, Gillingham 1; L Orient 1, Wigan 1; Mansfield 1, Bury 5; Northampton 0, Barnet 2; Rochdale 3, Cambridge Utd 1; Scarborough 0, Chester 0; Torquay 1, Scunthorpe 8. **Leading positions:** 1, Gillingham (14-28); 2, Preston (14-25); 3, Rochdale (14-25).

BELL'S SCOTTISH LEAGUE: Premier Division: Celtic 2, Aberdeen 0; Falkirk 2, Hearts 0; Hibernian 2, Kilmarnock 0; Partick 1, Motherwell 0; Raith 2, Rangers 2. **Leading positions:** 1, Rangers (10-25); 2, Celtic (10-21); 3, Hibernian (10-19)

First Division: Airdrie 2, Dundee 3; Clydebank 2, Hamilton 0; Dumbarton 0, Greenock Morton 2; Dundee Utd 3, Dunfermline 1; St Johnstone 0, St Mirren 0. **Leading positions:** 1, Dunfermline (11-24); 2, Dundee Utd (11-22); 3, Gr Morton (11-20).

Second Division: Ayr 0, East Fife 1; Forfar 1, Clyde 0; Queen of South 4, Montrose 2; Stirling 1, Berwick 0; Stranraer 2; Stenhousemuir 1. **Leading positions:** 1, East Fife (11-26); 2, Berwick (11-22); 3, Forfar (11-18).

Third Division: Albion 2, Alloa 1; Brechin 0, Caledonian T 0; Cowdenbeath 3, Queen's Pk 2; Livingston 0, Arbroath 1; Ross County 1, E Stirling 1. **Leading positions:** 1, Livingston (11-26); 2, Ross County (11-19); 3, Caledonian T (11-18).

Mandela has a field day in Soweto

John Perlman at Soweto

IS NELSON MANDELA losing his touch? That is the question South Africans are asking after their president made an unexpected appearance at Soweto Oval on the first morning of England's four-day match against an Invitation XI and failed to influence the outcome.

Mike Atherton and Alec Stewart had put on 27 for the first wicket when Mr Mandela arrived. But unlike the All Blacks, who never recovered from his appearance in a Springbok rugby jersey before the World Cup final, and the Zambian soccer team, who let in two goals minutes after a half-time meeting with the president, the England openers went on to make 163 before Atherton was caught at mid-on for 59.

But day one of the first first-class international in Soweto still belonged to Mr Mandela — a fine 94 by Stewart and a hat-trick by Meyrick Pringle notwithstanding.

"Should I take a walk round the field?" Mr Mandela asked the managing director of the United Cricket Board of South Africa, Ali Bacher, as he stepped from his Mercedes Benz. "Errr, I think there will be chaos if you do, Mr President," Mr Bacher replied. "There is a serious game of cricket being played here."

For 10 minutes, Mr Mandela saw little of the serious game of cricket. His view was blocked by a wall of cameras, microphones and journalists. But he did meet the players. He then did a half-circuit of the Oval, which brought excited children tumbling down from the stands and sent Mark Ramprakash scuttling to the dressing room to fetch his Instamatic.

Mr Mandela had the South African pace man, Richard Snell, chuckling. "He said to me, 'It's an honour to meet you'," Snell said. "I laughed because I thought it should have been the other way round."

John Crawley was also clearly tickled. "Mr Mandela looked at me and said, 'Shouldn't you be in school?' I didn't realise I looked that young."

When Mr Mandela met Devon Malcolm, he said: "So you are the destroyer," a reference to the England fast man's match-winning nine for 57 against South Africa at The Oval last year.

Did Mr Mandela ask him to go easier on the South Africans this time round? "No, he didn't," Malcolm said. "When it comes to competition, the president doesn't want anybody on either side to turn down their performance."

Malcolm videoed Mr Mandela's visit and made a short speech of thanks on behalf of the England team. "It's hard to put it in words really," he said. "But this has got to be one of the top moments in my life."

England made 332 in the first innings and the SA Invitation XI 209. The match was abandoned on the fourth day after torrential overnight rain turned the ground into marshland.